

A decorative border with floral and scrollwork motifs surrounds the central text and illustration. The top and bottom features larger, more complex floral designs, while the sides are simpler vertical lines with small decorative elements.

# QUEENSHITHE



HENRIETTA G. ROWE.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

---

Class. *PZ3* Copyright No. ....

Shelf. *R7925 Q*

---

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.























BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

---

"RE-TOLD TALES OF THE HILLS AND  
SHORES OF MAINE."

8vo, \$1.25.

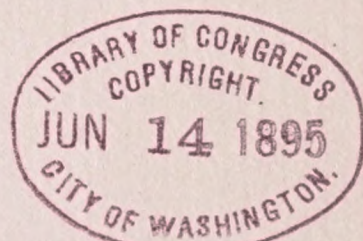


# QUEENSHITHE

BY  
HENRIETTA G. ROWE

AUTHOR OF  
"RE-TOLD TALES OF THE HILLS AND SHORES OF MAINE"

"*Get leave to work.*"  
—MRS. BROWNING.



BUFFALO  
CHARLES WELLS MOULTON  
1895



PZ<sup>3</sup>  
R7925Q

COPYRIGHT BY  
MRS. HENRIETTA G. ROWE.  
1895.



# CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
PRUE'S NEW BONNET . . . . .	9
CHAPTER II.	
MY LADY GREATHEART . . . . .	26
CHAPTER III.	
A "BILL FOR BURYIN' " . . . . .	41
CHAPTER IV.	
"ET TU BRUTE " . . . . .	57
CHAPTER V.	
"I SMELL A RAT!" . . . . .	72
CHAPTER VI.	
"MAN'S EXTREMITY " . . . . .	89
CHAPTER VII.	
"IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY " . . . . .	107
CHAPTER VIII.	
MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE . . . . .	125
CHAPTER IX.	
THE FIRST GENTLEMAN IN THE LAND . . . . .	144
CHAPTER X.	
LOVE IS MIGHTIER THAN LAW . . . . .	167







## CHAPTER I.

### PRUE'S NEW BONNET.

“WELL, to be sure, I have seen *worse* bunnits, in the course o' my life.”

And Roxy Rae balanced upon one uplifted hand a marvelous structure of straw and blue ribbons, known in the Rae household as “Prue's new bonnet,” while her plain face grew almost pretty with the smile, half tender, half proud, that gradually crept over it :

“You say Miss Squire Dean turned round twice in her pew during sermon time, to get a look at it?”

“*Three* times,” corrected Prue, her fair, childish cheek flushing rosily in remembrance of her innocent enjoyment of this unwonted bit of Sunday finery, with which her elder sister's loving ingenuity had provided her.

“The Patridge girls, both Plumy and Puff, come to me right after meetin, and wanted to know if”—

“I'd learn them to braid the pattern,” laughed Roxy with a dainty fillip at one of the huge tilting bows that marked the dividing line between crown and brim.

“I knew that would be the first thing,” she went on more soberly, and with a shade of annoyance in tone



and manner, "and,—I don't want to seem disoblign or stingy,—but this braid is my own invention, that I've been months thinkin out and workin up, and I do think I'd ought to have all there is to be made on it."

"Ye—es, I suppose so, but—"

She stopped short, with an uneasy glance at her sister's face, noting with secret trepidation, that the firm set mouth and chin had taken on those decided curves that, with Roxy, always meant a settled purpose to go straight ahead, let what would stand in the way.

"I'm afraid the neighbors 'll be dretfully put out," she ventured, "They'll think it's cropin in you wanting to keep the secret to yourself, and makin them pay f'r work that they could just as well do for themselves if they only knew how."

For a moment, Roxy looked as she felt, terribly hurt and grieved. Her pretty sister was her darling, and any hint of blame from her was harder to bear than the harshest censure of the whole world outside could possible be.

"It's for *your* sake,—your's and Sewell's,—" she said gently. "With the house and garden, and our straw work, spring and fall, we've contrived to make a decent living so far. But the time's comin when both of you ought to have a chance for a better education than you'd ever get here, and I've been thinkin and plannin' for some way to bring it about. To be sure I've laid up a little since father died, but it's only a little, not half enough to pay your school expenses for a single year, So this invention that I've kind o'



tumbled into, as you might say, at the last, I'm going to keep to myself, and if folks want bunnits made like it, they'll have to hire me to make 'em. In that way, I calculate that in the next three or four years, I shall be able to lay enough by to send Sewell to Bowdoin, and,—how would you like to go away to that school that Sarah Dean's goin to next fall?"

"Oh wouldn't I be happy!" and Prue's calm blue eyes,—a heritage from her gentle mother,—kindled with eager delight at the thought of such an un hoped-for privilege being made possible for her.

"I believe I'd go barefoot for the next three years, if I knew that, at the end of that time I could go there, and learn all about the wonderful things that Sarah says they teach there, and" with a little blush, "I could be a teacher perhaps sometime, myself, and earn lots of money, and get you some new and pretty dresses like other girls, and fix up the house, and buy Sewell all the new books he wants, and, oh! what lots and lots of beautiful things I'll do when I've learned enough to keep school myself."

Roxy smiled indulgently :

"You'd better remember the story of the milkmaid in the reading book, that counted her chickens before they was hatched." she said roguishly, with a nod in the direction of the unswept hearth, that the child interpreted with a conscious blush, and something as near a pout as her rosy lips were capable of :

"There's some comfort in *planning* pleasant things, even if they don't come out as you'd have them," she murmured, but her sister gently checked her with :



"There now, we wont make no more talk about it. I only wanted you to understand *why* I am so set on keeping the secret of this braid in my own hands. If you'll fly round, and brush up the floor now, I'll set right down to my straw work. The Barstow boys ought to a' had their hats a week ago,—Ben was in Saturday, and complained that 'twas getting so warm that he couldn't wear his fox-skin cap much longer, and I promised to hurry his hat up, right off."

The smiles had by this time come back to Prue's face, and as she wielded with practiced hand the broom of green, sweet smelling cedar twigs, drawing with it any number of queer, fanciful patterns upon the freshly sanded floor, she sang one of the favorite hymns of the day, her sweet, mellow tones falling upon her sister's partial ear like a pleasant prophecy of days to come, when this fair home flower might be transplanted to a sunnier and more congenial soil, where other eyes than hers would note and be gladdened by its pure loveliness.

In the quiet country neighborhood where the Raes had their home, the unselfish devotion of the elder girl to her orphaned brother and sister was regarded with approval or mitigated scorn, according to the spiritual lights of the lookers-on themselves.

Jefferson Hackett's widow, or the "widder Jeff" as she was known in neighborhood parlance, being a cousin, and the only relative that the Raes had in that part of the country, felt it her bounden duty to take Roxy to task for her unvarying care of the younger children:



“You’re a fool, Roxy Rae, working like a dog to keep them young ones spruced up fine as fiddles, while you wear the same old bombazine for best, year in, year out. If you’d only prink up a little, and go round more with the other young folks, like as not some good, likely feller’d take a shine to you,—for, though I can’t in conscience say you’re harnsome, you’re smart as a steel trap, and that goes a good ways with sensible young men now a-days, let me tell you. As ’tis’ you stand a fair chance of having to dance in the brass kettle at Prue’s weddin, or I’ll miss my guess.”

It was many a long day before the girl got over the smart of this cruel and indelicate side thrust, and it needed more than one kindly, encouraging word and smile from appreciative friends to heal the hurt that her womanly pride and self respect had suffered.

That Roxy was not “harnsome” according to the buxom standard of the country folk about her, the girl well knew, and perhaps this very consciousness of her own lack of personal charms may have accounted in part for the extravagant delight with which—however prudently concealed from its object,—she watched the unfolding beauties of her younger sister Prudence.

Still she was not uncomely, this dark browed, clear eyed girl, to those at least who, looking below the surface, could see and comprehend the brave, unselfish spirit that animated that unpretentious body; while kindly Nature had gifted her with something that, in many eyes, more than compensated for her lack of



personal beauty,—an ingenuity and skill, inborn rather than acquired, that made the simple country women hold up their hands in silent amazement, as one new “notion” after another made its appearance, evolved from her ever active, inventive brain.

And oh, the marvelous cunning of those supple brown fingers! whose every tip seemed to have a will power of its own, so smoothly and deftly did the most intricate piece of work assume the form and proportions of a perfected whole, under their skilful touch.

Netting and knotting, the progenitors of our modern “crochet,” were in high favor with the lovers of fancy work, in the early part of the century, and from far and near, maids and matrons flocked to see and admire Roxy Rae’s handiwork, and beg her to teach them the intricacies of those graceful patterns, for, most of them being her own invention, were a complete puzzle to the uninitiated eye.

Had she lived a century later, no doubt our little country maiden would have shown herself no insignificant competitor for the prizes offered for those artistic decorations that a revival of the half forgotten art of needlework has made popular; while on the other hand, a few centuries earlier would doubtless have found her employed by some fine lady of court or castle, to design patterns for a gorgeous altar cloth or silken pennon, unless, (which is quite as likely,) she had met the fate of a dabbler in the forbidden arts, and been drowned or hanged like other inventors of an age that held it a crime for a man, and



especially for a woman, to be brighter than her neighbors.

But now that courtly lady and castled dame were but pale shadows, looking out from a dim and nearly forgotten past, while the then sturdy spirit of the young Republic would have scorned to solicit their patronage even if they had still existed, there was small opportunity for Roxy to make her skill and taste profitable in a community of plain, hard working country folk, so that the only work that her clever fingers found to do was in the braiding of coarse straw hats and bonnets for the neighboring farmers and their thrifty wives and daughters, while even in this humble field she was not without a competitor.

The "widder Jeff," though comfortably circumstanced, with neither chick nor child to share her ample income, was always eager to turn what she called an "honest penny," by doing the same work for a few pennies less than her orphaned cousins could afford,—a consideration that had just as much weight with the well-to-do public of that day as with the selfish masses of our own, who shudder at the stories of the "sweater's" selfish tyranny, but keep right on buying his cheapened goods, just the same.

It was largely on account of this ungenerous rivalry, that Roxy had set her wits to the task of inventing a new braid,—something at once pretty and inexpensive, that "cousin Dorindy" would find it impossible to imitate.

Not even Prue dreamed of the sleepless hours



when the toils of the day were over, those patient fingers wrought unweariedly in the dim silence of the midnight hours, plaiting and re-plaiting the delicate wisps of oaten straw, oftentimes baffled and disheartened, yet plucking up fresh courage from each failure, until, after long weeks of patient experimenting, the perfected work appeared in a bonnet of the finest straw, filmy and delicate as a bit of lacework, and braided in a pattern so intricate that, when tastefully trimmed, and mounted in triumph above Prue's sunny curls, the little maiden cried delightedly :

“Why Roxy! I really believe you must a' got the spiders to help you,—nobody ever braided anything so much like a cobweb before.”

That cousin Dorindy would do her best to find out the secret of the new braid, Roxy well knew, and she was not in the least surprised when that very Monday morning, before the dew was fairly off the grass, a slim genteel figure, with a green silk calash pushed back from her faded but still unwrinkled face, and a pair of restless, light lashed eyes, whose furtive glances took in every detail of the modest household arrangements, walked composedly up the footway, and without the ceremony of knocking, entered the kitchen where Roxy was at work, and dropping into a convenient chair, remarked, with the sigh that usually prefaced any special communication that she might have to make, and which Sewell declared was always used as a blind for some intended meanness, just as she dropped the paper curtains of her bed ridden



old mother's room before serving her with her meager allowance of hasty pudding and molasses:

"Well, well, Roxy! hard at it as usual, I see. Whose that hat you're doin now, eh?"

Roxy smiled and nodded a kindly welcome:

"This? Why, it's for one o' the Barstow boys. I've got two to do for them, and I don't know whether Ben or Sam 'll have this one."

"Oh—um-m! You ain't got no orders yet, I take it, f'r one o' them flimsy things that Prue had on Sunday? I'm afraid folks generally won't take to it, —something more substantial and *respectable* lookin' su s the folks round here better. I heard one o' the neighbors say, (I won't call names so's ter make any trouble,) that she didn't really think that a braid like that, that you could almost see your head through, was what you might call exactly *modest*."

There was mockery, spite, and underlying all, a keen curiosity in tone and look that made Roxy, stout hearted as she was, feel a sudden sinking of her courage, in the presence of this unscrupulous, determined woman who, she well knew, would, while pretending to decry the new braid, leave no stone unturned to find out the secret of its manufacture, for her own profit.

But she would be very cautious and prudent, nothing should tempt her to part with her precious secret, so she shut her lips tightly for a moment, before she replied in her most matter of fact tone to her visitor's leading question, prudently ignoring the malicious hint, which was, without doubt a pure fabrication of the speaker's own brain:



“Oh no, of course not. It's hardly time yet for folks to be thinkin' of getting their summer bunnits out.”

The widow fidgetted uneasily in her chair, and when she spoke again her tone was much more conciliatory:

“I don't want to pry into other folk's affairs, (you know, yerself, Roxy, that I ain't that kind of a woman), but seein' we're *related* so, would you mind tellin' me where you learned to do that braid?”

Roxy's dark eyes shone with innocent triumph, as she tapped her own forehead suggestively:

“There,—where I most generally go for my new notions.” Her companion stared in open mouthed amazement.

“Are you sure that Sol. Barden's wife didn't give you jest a *hint* to start on, eh?”

“Mis Barden ain't got back from her last voyage yet.” The girl's tone was so sharply indignant, that her suspicious neighbor saw that she had gone too far, and secretly resolved to be more wary in the handling of this proudly honest nature. “I don't pass off other folk's inventions for my own,” she went on, with heightened color. “I'd just as soon pretend that Cap'n Barden's garden belonged to me, because it happened to be next mine, and help myself to his fruits and vegetables when he and his wife was away, as to claim credit for something that I didn't think out my own self.”

Ordinarily the girl would have disdained the use of this weapon, (significantly called by the country folks,



a "twit,") but she knew instinctively that this smooth-tongued woman would prove no mean antagonist, and that if she would guard her own rights, she could not afford to be nice in her choice of a missile. And really, Dorinda's appropriation of her absent neighbor's fruits and vegetables had been so open and shameless, that perhaps a hint upon the subject might prove a timely warning to her. But curiously enough, the guilty party showed not the least sign of confusion or anger.

"Well—well!" she responded, in her slow, half-indifferent fashion. "I wouldn't a' thought you had so much gumption in you,—but the Raes was always reckoned above the average as far as head work was concerned. And now, I s'pose, seein' you've invented the braid, you'll want something for learnin' other folks how to do it? I wouldn't mind payin' you a good, fair price,—say a dollar, or, well, I wouldn't mind seven an' sixpence,—jest to get so that I could braid a bunnit f'r myself."

Roxy's cheeks burned hotly, but her voice was very calm and steady as she replied:

"I'm not going to learn *anybody* how to do it, at *any* price. It's my property, and is going to be my living, and I never shall sell or give it away while I live, and need it myself."

Mrs. Jeff was silent for a few minutes, playing nervously with the fringe of her shawl, and keeping her eyes bent upon the floor, evidently in deep thought, then suddenly fixing her keen eyes upon her companion's face, she whispered persuasively:



“Look here, Roxy! I’ve always taken an interest in you, seein’ you’re my own cousin’s child, and I don’t mind runnin’ considerable risk to help you along. Now I’ll tell you what I’ll do: I’ll take you into company with me in the straw braidin’ business, (jest think o’ *that!*) and I’ll supply the money, and you the work,—that is, you’ll show me how to braid this new kind,—(the others I *know*,)—and we’ll work it together, and divide the profits even.”

“Do you mean that you’ll take me into company in *everything*,—learn me how to bleach and press straw, and trim, if I’ll show you how to do this braid, and then divide the profits with me?”

Mrs. Jeff threw up her hands with an involuntary gesture of amazement at such unheard of audacity.

“F’r King George’s sake, child, what *are* you thinkin’ of? I don’t calculate to give away my trade to anybody, and I shouldn’t think you’d dream of sech a thing. ’Twas only in the straw braidin’ that we’d be in company, of *course*.”

Roxy laughed outright.

“I can do better than that *alone*,” she declared frankly. “My straw costs me next to nothing, and I had rather have *all* than *half* of what I can earn. So I guess we won’t go into business together, yet awhile.”

A strange look that the speaker failed to comprehend, passed swiftly over the elder woman’s face, but there was no anger, only something of natural disappointment in her tone and manner, as she rose to leave, with:



"Oh well! do as you think best. I shan't crowd my advice nor help on nobody." And putting her head in at the door, as she stood upon the step outside, she called back good naturedly: "If you and Prue find yerselves overrun with work, I can lend you Peg for a few days, jest as well as not,—the lazy little shirk'll be better'n nobody."

Roxy hesitated, but Prue cried impulsively:

"Oh yes, cousin Dorindy, *do* let her come. We'd be ever so glad to have her."

"Poor little thing!" she added in an aside, "I'll be glad to give her all she wants to eat f'r once, and there won't be nobody here to box her ears, or shut her up in a dark closet if she dares to ask for a second slice of bread."

And wondering a little at her sister's unwonted silence, she went back to her work, with a pleasant sense of relief that cousin Dorindy's visit was so well over, and that, as she innocently imagined, Roxy and she had parted on the most friendly terms, in spite of the former's refusal to reveal the secret of the new braid. Simple little Prue! How should she suspect that, even in the proffered loan of Peg's services there might lurk some sinister purpose? And her shrewder sister, even if she mistrusted the seeming kindness, refrained from troubling the child with her formless suspicions.

The widow's visit proved however, but the beginning of annoyances, for, as Roxy had foreseen, applicants to learn the mystery of the new braid were



numberless. Neighbors from near, and strangers from afar, made it in their way during the next few weeks, to drop in upon the Raes, in quest of a few directions for a bonnet for self, daughter, cousin or neighbor, to be gotten up after the fashion of Prue's new headgear. According to their various natures, some frankly asked her to teach them the braid, and, when refused just as frankly acknowledged her right to keep it for her own use and profit alone; others tried by roundabout hints,—flattered, coaxed, and even quoted Scripture in support of the theory that, while the product of a man's hands is his own by inalienable right, the product of his brain should be freely bestowed upon the world at large, without money and without price.

To say that Roxy, unselfish and obliging by nature as by habit, was insensible to the disapproving words and frowns of her disappointed visitors, or oblivious of the temporary coolness of some whom she had counted as among her best friends, would be unnatural as well as untrue. Many a time her tender heart was grieved, and her honest pride humiliated by the unkind remarks of old customers, who could see nothing but an uncalled for meanness in her refusal to share this valuable secret of her trade with them. Still, having to a certain extent anticipated this trial, she had fortified herself with a courage born only of unselfish love, and for the sake of the dear ones dependent upon her, she was able to bear with patience a blame that, her own good sense told her, would soon be forgotten when her motives were more generally understood and appreciated.



To understand this flurry of indignant surprise on the part of the kind hearted townsfolk, we must remember that, in the years succeeding the Revolution, money was scarce, and manufactures of all kinds in their infancy, so that the farmer's wives and daughters in the outlying hamlets of New England were forced to exercise their taste and ingenuity in a hundred ways that, to the humblest of our own day, are entirely unnecessary. Among these the braiding of straw was no insignificant occupation, and if one added the skill to bleach and re-trim the time worn headgear that served the dames and maidens for best, the year round, she was really a very important factor in the community, and was supposed, in return for their custom, to give them all the hints and helps in her line that she was able,—“it would cost her nothing,” they reasoned, “just to give a body a few directions that would save their hiring their work done.” And nobody dreamed that, in the claiming of these neighborly helps as a right, they were actually defrauding the donor of *her* right to make a living by her taste and skill.

Thus Mrs. Jeff, although personally unpopular, was a woman of considerable influence among the feminine portion of the community, who looked upon her as the high priestess of fashion in the way of headgear, and it was really a refreshment to the simple souls to hear her discourse upon the latest “styles,” and watch her nimble fingers as they twisted and puckered odds and ends of ribbon into tasty knots and bows, that



always obeyed her will, standing up, tall and pert as the red and yellow holyhocks outside her window, or more modestly clinging to the bonnet, like broad winged butterflies, just as the fashion of the day in Bestport demanded.

With a monopoly of the bleaching and trimming, she had been content to see Roxy monopolize the larger share of the braiding, and it was not until this invention of her ingenious cousin, had aroused her to the possible profits to be found in that branch of the business, that she had really considered it worth her while to assume the position of a rival.

But that this new and dainty invention bade fair to drive the old stand-bys out of the field completely, Mrs. Jeff was shrewd enough to foresee, and with this thought, all her natural cupidity was awakened, and a determination to get at least a share of the coveted gains, by fair means or by foul, fully possessed her. It would be no wrong to Roxy,—indeed, she half persuaded herself that she was doing a handsome thing by the girl in offering to take her into partnership, as the price of getting an insight into the mystery of her invention. Her rooms were larger and more genteel, so that more of the well-to-do neighbors would be sure to patronize the new firm. And if, after the first season, she should conclude not to keep up the connection, why, Roxy would be none the worse off for a whole season under her supervision. It would be considerable trouble having her round, for Granny would be furious, (she hated the very name of Rae,) and like



as not Peg would be getting uppish, knowing that she could run to her with all her tales. But one must expect to put up with something in the way of business, and for relation's sake she was willing to give the girl a chance to get a good business training, that would be worth more than money to her in the years to come.

All this reasoning sounded very plausible when rehearsed in the privacy of her own bedchamber, with only the silent stars peeping between the folds of her gorgeous copperplate curtain, for listeners. But somehow, with Roxy's clear, honest eyes upon her, the arguments that she had meant to use sounded strangely one sided, and she angrily wondered at herself, as she walked thoughtfully homeward, that she had given up the partnership plan so easily, while, almost unconsciously, a meaner, still more selfish scheme began gradually to take form and shape in her active brain, —a scheme that had no pretence of benevolence in it, even to her, but was really excusable as a just (?) retaliation for the girl's ingratitude and meanness in refusing to part with her secret to her, her nearest kinswoman and would-be benefactress.



## CHAPTER II.

### MY LADY GREATHEART.

WHAT a poor, little forlorn mite it was,—ragged unkempt, and with the lithe, shy motions of some only half domesticated wild animal, in whose veins the savage blood of uncounted generations finds it hard to mingle with a later and gentler strain. Indeed, Mrs. Jeff had always insisted that the black hair and eyes, the dusky cheek—through which the warm crimson of health and happiness never shone,—as well as the stealthy step and low voice, were all sure indications that her small handmaiden had Indian blood in her veins, an imputation that Peg herself indignantly denied. Didn't everybody in town know her Canadian mother who, widowed and penniless, had drifted to this out of the way corner, to die, and be buried by the town, whose authorities had promptly disposed of her six-year-old child by "binding" her, until her majority, to Mrs. Jeff. That this thrifty matron had, during the seven years that had elapsed since then, contrived to get an amount of drudgery out of the unfortunate waif, that would have seemed incredible to a kinder and more compassionate mistress, everybody in town knew, by intuition if not by actual observation.

Half clothed and fed, and constantly subjected to



the petty tyranny of a mean, hard tempered woman, it is somewhat surprising that the child never complained of the treatment accorded her, even to the children of her own age, with whom she associated during the few weeks of school that her hard mistress was forced by law to allow her. Instead, she showed a wonderful shrewdness in eluding the questionings of the village matrons who, one and all, would have been only too glad to get some new proof of their unpopular neighbor's meanness, to talk about among themselves. More than once, it was whispered, the child had actually refused proffered food at the hands of those who had seen her eagerly devouring bits of bread thrown to the hens, insisting that she did not need it.

It was a queer kind of pride, and few would have understood, even if Peg had condescended to explain to them, the inborn feeling of honor that forbade her holding up to scorn the woman whose bread she ate from day to day, even though that bread was of the poorest and scantiest, and seasoned with the bitter herbs of grudging dependence.

Only Roxy Rae and her gentle hearted sister had the smallest conception of what the child really endured, both mentally and physically, for it was to them alone that she showed the real side of a nature, proud, tender, patient, with a poetic instinct, flashing out at unlooked for times, in queer, wayward fancies, that even Roxy, sympathetic but matter of fact, often found herself mystified and bewildered by.

On a pleasant morning in May, not long after Mrs.



Jeff's memorable visit to her young cousins, the "borrowed peg," as Prue laughingly called her, sat in the pleasant, sunshiny kitchen of the Rae farmhouse, plaiting with deft fingers one of the coarse straw hats for which Roxy had taken an order months before, but which, owing to the time spent upon Prue's new bonnet, was now considerably overdue.

Stopping now and then to take a bite from the big piece of delicious "spider cake" that Prue had dropped into her lap, giving her no chance to refuse the unwonted dainty, even if she had been so disposed, the child chatted as freely and blithely as if the rare privilege of speaking without the fear of rebuke, had something exhilarating in its sense of mental freedom, apart from the glad consciousness that, for a few happy days at least she would be free from the hated censorship of her harsh mistress, and enjoying the society of the only beings in the world about whom her chilled affections could find room to cling.

"There goes 'Mr. Legality,'" she remarked gravely, as a portly, middle-aged man strode leisurely along the highway, in full view from the open door.

Prue stared.

"Why, that's Squire Biddle," she said, craning her neck to get a better look at the passing figure.

"What did yon call him, Peg?"

"'Mr. Legality,'—the man that helps people get rid of their burdens, by either pretendin' that they don't have any, or else that they was too light to make any account of," persisted the child, with a shrewd



twinkle in her black eyes. "Didn't you ever read about him in the 'Pilgrim's Progress?'"

"Why yes, to be sure," returned Prue, the puzzled frown still wrinkling her smooth forehead, "but what do you know about the book?"

"I know *all* about it," was the ready reply. "Mis Jeff, she lets me have that and the Bible to read Sundays, so't I can learn all about my sins, and what's likely ter happen to me if I don't mend my ways. Sometimes Granny'll let me read 'er to sleep with the 'Progress,'—she always wants to hear about old 'Raw Head' and 'Bloody Bones,' she says they kind o' quiet 'er down when she's nervous. Why," warming with her subject, "I can pick out most all the folks right round here,—there's lots an' lots of 'em right in the neighborhood."

Both girls were by this time greatly interested, for that wonderfûl allegory that, so long as the road to the Celestial City is trodden by the feet of Heavenward bound pilgrims, will never lose its charm, was really the only book containing a grain of poetry or romance that the strict literary censorship of the day and neighborhood allowed to youthful readers.

"Tell us about some of them, Peggy dear," coaxed Prue, and as Roxy added her:

"Yes, *do*, Peggy."

The child went on with her quaint imaginings:

"There's old Cap'n Dickory, he's 'Talkative,'—you know what 'Faithful' said about him?"



'How Talkative at first lifts up his plumes,  
How bravely doth he speak, how he presumes  
To drive down all before him.' "

"Sure enough!" laughed Roxy, "that's the old man to a T,—he never lets anybody get in a word edgewise when he's round. But what do you call his wife? She can't be Mis' Talkative, for she never dares to peep before him."

"She's Mrs. Much-afraid," retorted the midget, so promptly that it was evident that the poor woman's place had been already assigned her in Peg's quaint picture gallery. "Deacon Walcott is 'Mr. Despondency,' and Nat Graves is 'Simple-mind.'"

"Why?" queried both girls in a breath.

"Because he can't see what 'My Lady Feigning,'—(that's the widder Jeff,) is up to, with her smooth words, and her smiles, and her callin' him in every time he goes by, to ask his advice about the farmwork. Ugh! he's a green one though, and she,—"

Roxy cast a warning glance at her sister, who was all atiptoe with a girl's mischievous curiosity to ferret out a possible love affair, but checking herself at the mute reminder, she only asked innocently:

"And who am I, Peg?"

"You? oh, you're 'Mercy,' because Mercy, you know, 'was of a fair and alluring countenance.'"

Prue blushed and laughed, while her sister asked curiously:

"And yourself, Peggy?"

"I'm only the 'damsel whose name was Humble-mind,' and you are 'My Lady Greatheart.'"



“What an idea!” cried Roxy. “What, in the world, ever possessed you to give me such a name as that?”

The child dropped her work upon her lap, and looked long and lovingly into the brave, kindly face of her one friend and champion.

“Ain’t you the only one that’s ever dared to stand between me an’ Mis’ Jeff in her tantrums?”

Her voice trembled, and almost broke into tears as she put the question, while the conscious color crept to Roxy’s dark cheek, and involuntary she lifted her hand, as if to ward off this undesired reminder of a bitterly cruel scene that she, on her part, would gladly have forgotten.

“Didn’t you put me behind you, just as Greatheart did the poor little children, when Giant Grim come out against ’em? and didn’t you tell her that if she struck me a single blow with that rollin’-pin you’d complain of ’er to the town authorities?”

“Oh, well—well,” stammered the girl, as shame-faced at hearing this story of her brave defence of the helpless re-told, as if it had been something to her discredit. “It’s best to let bye-gones be bye-gones. And as to that, I didn’t do no different from what anybody’d a’ done under the circumstances. Dorindy’s temper was up, and she didn’t more’n half realize what she was doing; and then, Peggy, child,—thee knows thyself, that thy speech was not befitting a maid to her mistress.”

Roxy never took advantage of the dialect that,



throughout her childish years, had been the familiar mode of speech in the home of her Quaker grandparents, with whom much of her time was spent, except as now, to soften some not to be evaded reproof, or possibly, when under great excitement, that she might express herself more forcibly in what was really her mother-tongue.

Prue's cheek dimpled mischievously, while Peg, not a whit abashed at the gentle reproof, tilted a saucy nose in the air, and went on with her braiding as composedly as if this little outburst of grateful love, so foreign to her usual shy reticence, was nothing more than a stray gleam of sunshine upon some shaded pool, a sudden glint, then lost in the original darkness as completely as if it had never been.

It was only when the young house-mother, after the work of the day was over, gathered her little brood about her, in the sweet, purple twilight, and in her simple, trusting fashion, besought the protection and blessing of the Father of the fatherless, not only for her own dear ones but for the friendless little stranger within her gates, that Peg again referred to the conversation of the morning, and then it was in a whispered aside, that might mean much or nothing, at any rate Roxy took little note of it except to smile at its quaint mysteriousness.

“Look here, Roxy! Old mother ‘Bat’s Eyes’ says that Dorindy never forgets a grudge, and that she’s sure to pay her debts of that kind, sooner or later, with interest;—so you jest look out.”



The name applied so fittingly to Dorindy's bedridden old grandmother, that in laughing at the queer conceit, Roxy failed to notice the underlying hint of her kinswoman's secret enmity to herself. And as, during the remaining days of her stay, Peg herself made no farther allusion to the matter, it passed completely from her mind, or was casually recalled by some one of the odd speeches with which the child loved to interlay her lively chatter, when, encouraged by Prue, she gave free rein to her whimsical conceits and fancies.

And now the thrifty little woman had enough to occupy her thoughts as well as her hands, for the new bonnet had, as she hoped, proved a good advertisement of her invention, and from far and near came orders, even from those who had been the loudest in denouncing what they had called her "stinginess" in refusing to share her secret with the public generally.

"The girls was such fools, that nothin' would do but they must have bunnits of that kind o' braid," was the half grudging explanation that usually accompanied the order, for the new "Martha Jeffersons,"—(as Roxy had shrewdly christened her braid,) soon became so popular that, in spite of her own unwearied exertions, and the help of the children,—for even Sewell had been pressed into the service,—she found it all that she could do, by working early and late, to supply the demand.

"Why don't you take a prentice?" suggested a neighbor, who had dropped in for an hour's friendly



gossip. "There's plenty of good, smart girls that 'd jump at the chance."

Roxy drew one of the crisp, shining straws through her slender fingers irresolutely.

"That would be giving away the secret," she said, with a little heightening of her color, for she was not yet quite reconciled to the charge of meanness, that she still heard now and then, from some discontented body, who could only see her own side of the question. "I've made more in the few weeks that I've worked on this braid, than I ever made in a whole year before on the plain straw work. So you see I can't afford to learn the art to anybody else, and run the risk of their settin' up in opposition to me."

"To be sure,—I never thought of that. But why don't you get a patent on it? That'd make it unlawful for anybody to take it up on their own hook without payin' you for the privilege. *Then* you could take all the prentices you wanted to, and I don't see any reason why you couldn't build up a big business in time."

To this the girl made no reply. She was too completely dazed by such an unheard of idea to know what to say. That she, a *woman*, should venture to apply for a patent, and all for a new *braid of straw*! The idea was preposterous, and for a moment, she really thought that her friend must be joking. To be sure, there was Elmer Smith who got a patent for his new mill wheel; and Major Herrick had applied for one on a new plow that he had invented. But they



were *men*, and their inventions were of consequence to the country at large. Such a thing as a woman's inventing anything worth the government's notice had never even been heard of, and Roxy felt her cheeks burn with modest shame at her own temerity in debating such a question, even for a moment. So she humbly put it aside with all the other impracticable bits of friendly counsel with which her good neighbors were so inconveniently lavish, and applied herself to her work with a cheery devotion, that cared little for fatigue or personal inconvenience so long as her plans for those she loved seemed in a fair way of being fulfilled.

Peg's stay at the cottage, owing to the unusual press of work, had been lengthened from days into weeks, and trusting to her honest loyalty, Roxy had taken no pains to keep her handiwork hidden from those sharp eyes, that took in everything from the preparation of the straw down to the delicate final touches that were needful to give the braid its superior sheen and finish.

"*I can help on that,*" the child proudly announced one day as Roxy hesitated over an order that must be finished in a given time, "I've watched how it's done, and I can do it just as well as you can, and a good deal better than *Prue*."

The sisters looked at each other in silent consternation.

"You know, Peg," and Roxy spoke with a sternness unusual with her, "that I have refused to show *anybody* how to make this braid, and now you have"



—she would have said “stolen it,” but the appealing look checked her,—and she finished her sentence with the less harsh, “found it out, without my consent.”

Astonishment, pain, and a blush of intense mortification passed by turns over the dusky face, while the eyes that were uplifted to her friend’s troubled face, glistened with a moisture rarely seen in their dark, unfathomable depths.

“Why Roxy! didn’t you know that I was trying to learn so that I could *help you*? I wouldn’t tell anybody else how ’twas done, f’r the world,—I’d *die* first.”

Roxy’s brow cleared, and she patted kindly the rough, dark head at her knee.

“I don’t believe you would,—at any rate I aint afraid to trust you. Only,”—in a compassionate rather than apprehensive tone, “it would have been a good deal better for *you*, not to have learned how to braid the pattern, for then, you could have told Dor-indy truthfully that you could’nt show her how ’twas done, if she should take it into her head to question you about it.”

A look passed over the childish face that Roxy never forgot,—a look such as one of the christian martyrs might have worn when listening to the growls of the caged lion that was so soon to lap his blood:

“I never will tell her, if she starves and beats me to death, no, not even if she ties me up by my thumbs, as she did that time that Granny told her that I stole a half-dollar of the money that the old



witch keeps in a bag in bed with her. I fainted dead away, and I guess she was pretty scart, for she aint never tried it since,—(only she does pull hair *awful*, when her grit's up.'') Roxy's heart grew hot within her at this childish revelation of her kinswoman's cruel tyranny, but it was the fashion of her day never to criticize its elders in a child's hearing, so she only asked, with a clumsy attempt at the discreet coolness of an unprejudiced listener;

"Did she ever find the money?"

"Oh law, yes! 'twas inside the straw tick, where, it had worked itself in when the bed was being made up, some time. Something else she found there too, but how that got there she could'nt guess, and if Granny knew, she wouldn't tell."

"What was that?"

Peg drew a long breath at the remembrance.

"'Twas a paper, folded lengthways, and had a lot of writing on it. Miss Jeff just about flew into flinders over it, and Granny tried hard to make 'er burn it up. But I guess she didn't quite darst to, though once she held it so close to the candle that she scorched the edges, and Granny all the time bawlin:

"Burn it, Dorindy, you fool! burn it, I say!"

"But she didn't after all,—thought better on't, I guess, and finally she locked it up in that old secretary where her husband used ter keep his papers."

"What *could* it have been?" questioned both girls in a breath, but Peg shook her head ignorantly:

"I dunno. Only one thing I *do* know, and that is,



that Granny must 'a got hold of it before she was bedridden, and that's two years ago come Christmas. You know she had 'er shock just after Hackett died, and that was the first of December. Whatever 'twas, that was Miss Jeff's first squint at it, and a terrible wommblecropt woman she was when she read it. You remember Hackett, and that he wa'ant one much given to talkin over his affairs to anybody,—not even to his wife."

Yes Roxy remembered only too well the little, bent-shouldered, cold eyed man who, at their father's death, had produced a mortgage, covering all the hard earned acres that Elton Rae had hoped to leave as a heritage to his orphaned children, who were thus thrown upon their own resources, with only the cover of their humble roof for a shelter, and the produce of a by no means large vegetable garden to supply their actual necessities. Their only cow had been sold to pay the dead man's funeral expenses, while of the half dozen sheep, one after another had gone to the shambles to provide for the wants of the now undefended household. It was a bitter memory, but the girl recalled, with pardonable pride, the fact that she had refused the offered help of the town, and by her own energy and foresight, had provided a comfortable if humble maintenance for herself and the younger children, thus she was able to think forgivingly of the dead, even adding a word of commendation:

"Cousin Jeff was always good to Granny,—she lost a good friend when he died."



"Two of a trade! of *course* they agreed," muttered Peg, whose remembrance of the deceased was not calculated to greatly prejudice her in his favor.

"They'd either of 'em skin a flea f'r his hide an taller. Mis' Jeff, she's mean enough in all conscience, but she couldn't hold a candle to either of them."

"Granny's childish," returned Roxy apologetically. "Now, when we were little, and father was alive, she seemed to think a sight of us, but since she had her shock, she can't bear the sight of us. Sickness and old age have changed her a good deal."

Peg pursed up her mouth knowingly, but she made no farther comment. Indeed, in recalling afterward her revelations in regard to the mysterious paper, Roxy wondered not a little at the unwonted freedom with which she discussed the Hacketts, a freedom so different from her usual reticence when speaking of the widow and her whimsical, half demented old mother. Dorindy wouldn't like it at all if she should happen to find out that the child had spoken so freely even to them, and she was careful to caution Prue against repeating any of her indiscreet revelations, a caution that that young lady rather resented as implying a doubt of her own prudence and shrewdness.

"Do you suppose I'd tell anything that would get that poor little dot into trouble?" she cried. "But, honestly, Roxy, if the s'lectmen knew how Dorindy abuses her, they'd take her away from her right off."

"There aint no doubt of that,—but who, do you suppose would take it upon themselves to tell them?



Nobody'd want to get Dorindy's ill will, and she's one of the largest tax-payers in town, so the town officers wouldn't be in too great a hurry to believe the story if they should hear it."

Prue sighed dismally.

"Seems to me the poorer you are, and most in need of help of the law, the less likely you are to get it."

"Oh no!" interrupted Roxy, too loyal to bear this imputation upon the laws of her beloved land in silence.

"It aint with us as 'tis in countries governed by a king,—one man here is just as good as another in the eyes of the law, only riches give anybody an advantage of *course*, anywhere. Father used to say that this chance for every man to get riches for himself, no matter how poor he was born, was the one thing that was going to make us the biggest and richest nation in the world."

"Will it make us the best and happiest, too?" queried Prue childishly.

"Of *course* it will. Aint our government the very best in the world, and aint we got the very best and wisest men to run it?"

And Roxy settled herself contentedly to her work, serenely smiling as she thought of the utter impossibility of a government by the people for the people, proving anything but a glorious success in every department, and for all ages to come.



## CHAPTER III.

### A "BILL FOR BURYIN'."

THAT the "widder Jeff" was never absent from the weekly prayer meeting was no proof of her piety, nor, on the other hand, of her spiritual insincerity.

It is easy, and therefore common, to brand those whose profession and practice fail to agree, as hypocrites, whose aim is to cheat the world into believing them vastly better than they really are, but what about the *self* deceptions that these people almost invariably practice?

When Mrs. Jeff stood up in prayer meeting, and in the meek and reverent tones befitting the place and occasion, confessed her short-comings, and expressed her desire to be in all things a humble follower of the Christ, did she for a moment realize that the whole end and aim of her life was in direct opposition to his oft repeated, and earnestly emphasized teachings, of service to God through unselfish love toward our fellow man?

When her not unmusical voice joined devoutly in the hymns of praise that, for the time being, lent the sanctity of a temple to the little, low school-room, with its hacked and dingy desks, faintly illumined by



the light of the one or two whale oil lamps upon the reader's table, did she remember to contrast her own selfish and sordid plans and purposes with the grand ideal of self renunciation expressed in her favorite

“O thou who hast our sorrows borne,”

Never, in all probability, had the thought even occurred to her that the religion worn so fittingly with her best bonnet, had anything to do with the days when that old green calash was a suitable and convenient head covering.

The truth is, we each and all of us have a choice little vocabulary contrived especially for our own use and benefit, wherein certain faults and meannesses, vices even, peculiar to our own character, drape themselves in such innocent guise that they actually hoodwink their possessor himself into thinking them allowable weaknesses, if not actual virtues.

Thus, Mrs. Jeff's grasping selfishness might assume to her partial eye the character of a self-protective instinct, especially needful to a woman in her mateless condition; meanness paraded as that most popular of New England virtues—thrift; while the persistency with which she clung to any project for her own individual advancement, regardless of the rights or feelings of others, showed a talent for business as rare as it was admirable, at a time when, haggling with a traveling tin peddler over the comparative worth of paper rags and tinware, was really almost the only field in which the New England matron could allow her business faculties even a casual curvet.



That the little world about our thrifty widow was not so blind to her faults goes without saying, and as Nathan Graves, a well-to-do bachelor farmer, whose home was just outside the village, and adjoining one of the valuable pieces of property belonging to the deceased Jefferson, sat, watching half unconsciously, upon a certain evening in May, the devotional droop of that black bonneted head, he caught himself wondering, even during Deacon Potter's opening prayer, if the stories rife among the village folks, of her parsimony and ill-temper, were not greatly exaggerated after all? She was so quiet spoken, so modest in her air and dress, and yet, he remembered and shuddered,—he was as tender hearted as a young maiden, this great, hulking son of toil,—the stories of her treatment of the little bound girl, whose shy, prematurely sharpened face had always had a pathetic interest for him, and when, a little later, he listened to the low, carefully modulated tones of the widow, as she "testified" as usual, he grew more and more puzzled as to which was the real "widder Jeff," the quiet, black-robed woman of the prayer-meeting, or the hard tempered, driving mistress of the best cared for farm in the town, whose sharpness at a bargain—

He sat back sulkily in his hard, narrow seat, and glowered with reddened cheeks at a big patch on the opposite wall, from which the plaster had fallen, leaving the bare lathes gaping like the ribs of an only half reconstructed mastodon.

For the good man had a grievance, and in his eyes at least, it was a very large one.



Among the various offices in town and church to which the sensible, clear-headed farmer had been called by his appreciative fellow townsmen, was that of sexton, and although he had insisted, again and again, that the duties were distasteful, and the emoluments ridiculously small, he had never succeeded in getting his release from the undesirable office. In fact, it was a standing joke with the fun loving members of the nominating board, to receive and dispose of Nat Graves' annual "resignation."

"You're the strongest man in town, and there an't another that can dig a grave in as good shape as you can, or lay out a body, on occasion, equal to ye, So don't talk o' resignin', if you vally the peace o' mind an' well bein' o' yer feller citizens, *dead or alive.*"

This was always the way in which his resignation was met, and no matter how hard the poor fellow pleaded and argued, he never succeeded in shaking off the unwelcome honor (?) thus persistently thrust upon him.

It *was* hard, for he had a constitutional horror of death, and all its grim paraphernalia, while so sympathetic was his nature, that he never could grow callous to the sight of the mourner's tears, although the dead might have been in life one of his greatest aversions.

"I tell you" he grumbled, one evening, as, after a hard day's work at chopping, in the snow whitened forest, he dropped into Deacon Potter's store for a



friendly gossip with the village wiseacres who always congregated there of a winter evening, "I tell you it's mighty tough on a feller to have to leave his work at everybody's beck an' call, an' spend a good half day diggin' in sile that's friz down three foot or more."

He spread his great hands to catch the warmth from the blazing hemlock logs, and spit with angry energy full in the face of one of the unwinking Saracen's heads that adorned the iron fire-dogs, while his listeners nodded intelligently.

"Who is it?" asked one, with suddenly awakened interest.

"Cross Barker."

"Consumption?"

"No, neumony."

"Left anything?" queried a little, rat-faced man, with a greater appearance of interest than any of the others had shown.

Nat Graves looked keenly into the face of the interlocutor with a smile of quiet contempt upon his bearded lips, for a full moment, before he answered guardedly :

"Well—yes.—I guess his widder won't have to call on the town f'r help, yet awhile, at any rate. But 'taint a real easy job f'r a weakly woman like Mrs. Barker to provide for a growin' family of seven youngsters, and the oldest not more'n twelve year old. F'r my part, I never felt worse about buryin' a man than I do him."



The little man grinned derisively,

“So you *always* say, Nat,” he remarked with a sneer. “But why I asked, I’ve got a small bill agin ’im, and I’m glad ter know that the widder’s good f’r it. Now here’s Nat,” turning to the giant in the corner, against whom for some reason, he seemed to have a special grudge, “has the advantage of the rest of us,—he gits his pay the first thing,—no dilly-dallyin with the sexton, let who will, wait. If a fammerly’s poor as Job’s turkey, they’ll pay the bill f’r buryin’ if they have ter live on two meals a day,—*pride* ’ll make ’em honest there, if they cheat everybody else out o’ their fair dues.”

“My bill an’t a very hefty one,” grumbled the discontented Nat, “two dollars, and I have ter pay a man to help me, out o’ that. Grave diggin’ won’t never make a man rich,—in *these* parts, at any rate,” he added, a grim smile passing over his weather beaten face, and changing into a laugh of genuine mirth as he took in at one comprehensive glance the diminutive figure and mean proportions of the man before him, “I’ll dig *your* grave, Jeff, f’r half a dollar, any time that you say so, if you’ll promise to do the same by me, if I go first.”

He stretched himself upward as he spoke, and the contrast between the two was so ludicrously striking that everybody laughed uproarously in appreciation of the joke, which, grim as it was, seemed very funny to these sober-minded, hard-headed men, whose ancestors only a few generations back had found a pilloried



quaker or a half drowned woman tied to a ducking-stool legitimate objects of mirth. The little man alone seemed to see no joke in the matter.

"Very well," he said, glancing sharply about him, "Here's the Deacon, an' Ezry Coombs, an' Humphrey Bridges, an' the Lane twins, all witnesses of our bargain. You can't back down now, if you want to," he added, with a suspicious hollow cough, that shook his meager frame from head to foot, and called from the Deacon, after he had left the store, the shrewd comment:

"I b'lieve Jeff Hackett's got the consumption, true's you live, and that he knows it, too, which accounts for his catchin' at Nat's offer, and tryin' to make it appear like a genuine bargain instead of a joke."

And sure enough, six months later, the village bell tolled solemnly the forty-seventh strokes, that announced to the listening townspeople that Jefferson Hackett had departed this life, "in hope of a glorious hereafter," (the officiating preacher read,) and even those whom he had most mercilessly fleeced, had not the heart to begrudge that scrap of consolation to the one solitary mourner for the dead.

It was while digging his grave that the scene in the Deacon's store was recalled to the mind of Nat Graves, and he laughed rather shamefacedly as he brushed the yellow loam from the overalls that covered his sturdy nether limbs, and plied his spade with that sense of exquisite satisfaction that comes to the toiler whose strength is more than sufficient to his task.



“ I don’t s’pose twas really a kind thing to do to poke fun at the little wassup, and I wouldn’t if I’d known what poor health he was enjoyin’. But I guess, on the whole, I’ve got the best end of the bargain.”

And he pulled his hat lower over his face to hide the smile from his fellow worker, for it is one thing to laugh at a man when in life, and an altogether different thing to laugh at him when for aught you know, his disembodied spirit may be watching you across the top of his own headstone.

But he did not feel at all like smiling, when, on presenting his bill to the widow, she calmly reminded him of his contract with her deceased lord.

“ I was only funning,” he explained, considerably taken aback at this unexpected resurrection of that now unsavory jest, “ I never thought of his takin’ me in earnest.”

“ A very queer kind of fun, dryly remarked the widow. “ You know the saying, that it’s dangerous to play with edge tools, and I’d advise you to be a little more careful the way you fling your jokes about next time. But as f’r the bill, I’ll pay you the half dollar agreed upon, and no more, unless,” casting down her eyes and softly smoothing out the creases in her best black apron, “ unless *we can come to some kind of an understanding later on.*”

And honest Nat, as utterly free from guile as the “ very large, fine bear ” in the story books, accepted the words in all good faith, even when they necessitated numberless social calls, to talk over the matter,



and debate with the ever complacent widow the question of his acceptance of the diminutive sum offered:

"It was not," as he was always careful to explain, "that he was greedy for that extra dollar-and-a-half. But a man has the right to be paid fairly for his work, whether the job is a large or a small one, and its be-littlin' his own work when he consents to take half of what it's really worth."

"But," reminded the widow, to whom "Poor Richard's" shrewd maxims never came amiss, "you know the saying, 'Half a loaf's better'n none.'"

Nat shook his head slowly, doubtfully. He was a man whose thoughts were of slow growth, but when an idea once got firmly "set" in his rugged brain, the roots struck and *held on*. Moreover, he was something of a political economist, in a small way, and had his own notions of the possibility of reconciling the doctrines of Thomas Jefferson with those of the Man of Galilee.

"I dunno about that—always supposin' that you've fairly airned the whole loaf, and the one that owes it to ye is able to pay his just dues. Mebbe it don't make so much difference to *me*,—we'll allow that,—but," emphasizing with one stubby forefinger upon the palm of the other toil-hardened hand, "what about the next feller and his *quarter* loaf? f'r it stan's ter reason that if *I* don't have but *half* a loaf, the man next ter me don't get but a *quarter*, an the next an *eighth*, and so on, till there's a mighty small bite left for the end man."



The widow smiled placidly:

“That’s the end man’s business, not your’n.”

“Well, there ’tis again,” and the honest fellow’s face took on a shade of deeper feeling, “you know the rule that we profess to go by—‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you do ye even so unto them,’ and how you going to reconcile it to yer conscience, to butter yer own bread by makin’ yer neighbor live on crusts? Seems to me ’twould be fairer and more christian like, ’f the times was hard, and butter scase, to eat yer loaf *without*, ruther’n let yer neighbor go hungry. ‘Live and let live’ is a pretty fair law, accordin’ to my reckon’, and the man that is pilin’ up dollar on dollar—more’n he can possibly spend in a lifetime,—and is cuttin’ down the poor boy that cleans out his barnyard, an’ foddors his stock,—does all the dirty jobs that he don’t want ter do himself,—to the very last penny, jest because the poor feller must work f’r what he can get, or starve, aint doin’ his dooty as an American citizen, as a man, nor as a christian.”

He spoke earnestly, and with a simple directness that did honor to his rugged manliness, and however his listener might disapprove of his sentiments, she well knew that in his own life he lived up to them most faithfully, and that it was a saying in the neighborhood that Nat Graves’ hired men were paid better, fed better, and did better work than those of any other farmer within the town limits. If a wild, wayward boy, who chanced to be one of the town’s charges,



could be tamed by no one else, he was sure to be stranded at last upon the Graves place, and once there, no farther complaint was ever heard, either of the master's tyranny and injustice, or the boy's laziness and trickery. That simple rule to which the man had squared his life seemed to work wonders on all who came beneath its influence.

Dorindy knew all this, and yet—

“He that provideth not for his own household is worse than an infidel.”

She repeated the words very softly, and in her meekest of prayer-meeting tones, but Nat had heard that much abused quotation too often to be unprepared for it.

“I take it that that don't mean that we shall provide f'r our own at somebody else's expense, whether we're the one that hires, or the one that's hired. The fact is, as the Constitootion has it, every man has equal rights, and if I underpay my workman f'r doin' a fair job, jest because he needs the work, and can't live without it, I'm *stealin'* from him,—his time, and strength, and skill, all of which are his by right. Then, on 'tother hand, if he shirks his work,—only workin' when my eye is on him,—and breaks my tools, and wastes my substance, he's *stealin'* my money, by not givin' me the fair equivalent agreed upon between us.”

“You're puttin' the question ruther strong, seems ter me,” was the modest rejoinder. “But I s'pose, bein' a man, you understand sech things better'n we weaker vessels do.”



They were sitting alone together in Mrs. Jeff's neat sitting-room, for it had chanced (?) when meeting was over, that Nat had found himself walking side by side with the widow out of the school-house, and up the road that led to their respective homes,—an arrangement that had become quite frequent of late, although without the least design on the part of the unsuspecting swain.

But to-night, for the first time, he had begun to feel an uneasy consciousness that this constant dancing attendance upon Jefferson Hackett's widow, for the sake of a sum, insignificant in itself, and of importance only as a matter of principle, was really placing him in an embarrassing position, from which it would be wise to withdraw as soon as possible, especially as there was an undertone of tenderness in the widow's low spoken words that made the honest fellow feel that he was perhaps arousing sentiments in that bereaved female's breast that it would be impossible for him to reciprocate, and dishonorable to encourage.

Rising from his seat, with the usual country formula, that 'twas "about time he was travelin' to'ards home," he was surprised to feel the widow's hand pressing hard upon his coat sleeve, while in a shrill whisper she bade him be silent, pointing meanwhile to the door leading into an adjoining bedroom, occupied by the bed-ridden old mother and Peg,—the child having to serve as night-nurse to the often wakeful, and always irritable old dame.

Slowly the door turned, as they looked, creaking



upon its hinges, and into the dimly lighted room crept a shrinking, faintly outlined form, that might have been a shadow but for the faint rustle of its scant night garments, and the soft patter of bare feet upon the floor, as, taking no heed whatever of the silent watchers, she passed aimlessly from one object to another, now making gestures as if dusting the various articles of furniture, then carefully re-arranging a rug here and there, upon the neatly painted pine floor.

Although her eyes were wide open, there was no light of consciousness in them, and Nat, who had never happened to witness the phenomenon of sleep walking before, felt a cold shiver run down his back, while his sturdy knees shook beneath him at sight of this, to him, strange mystery of an unsleeping soul directing the movements of a body whose natural senses were locked in the most profound slumber.

But Mrs. Jeff was evidently too well used to the sight, to share in his awe or wonder, in fact, she was secretly delighted to be able to get up a little impromptu show for the benefit of her visitor.

"Keep still, so's not to wake 'er!" she whispered warningly. "And if she aint *too* sound asleep, I'll show you what I can make her do in this state. She minds enough sight better when she's asleep than when she's awake," she added, in an incautiously spiteful undertone.

And taking a half-finished stocking from her work-basket, she put it into the child's hands, with the low, but firmly spoken command:



“Knit.”

For a moment it seemed as if the work was about to drop from the listless, uncertain hands, and something of bewilderment and perplexity appeared in the movements of her head, as if the sleep dulled senses were feebly striving to comprehend the idea that had been thus suddenly thrust upon them, but at a more emphatic and stern—

“Knit! Knit!” the limp fingers grasped more firmly the familiar needles, and began knitting, with a slow, deliberate motion, never halting or varying, just as a delicately complicated machine would work, under the requisite conditions.

“Je whittiker!” ejaculated the astonished spectator, beneath his breath,—“if that don’t beat all creation! But see here, Mis’ Hackett, do you s’pose you could make her do anything that she wa’ant used to,—didn’t know by heart, as you might say?”

The widow thought for a moment, and then a strange look, half doubtful, half triumphant, passed across her face, and a cunning smile curled her thin lips, as she hastily took from a closet a bundle of prepared oaten straws, and shaking them out upon the table, gently forced the sleeping child into a chair beside it.

“And now,” she said, putting her face down until her cheek almost touched the girl’s own, “*braid the braid that you learned to do from Roxy Rae.*”

A shiver passed over the child’s senseless form, and she wavered to and fro for a moment, as if about to



fall from her chair, but the inexorable command being repeated, she took the straws in her fingers, and began the task, with a look of such utter wretchedness upon her white face that Nat Graves' tender heart was touched, and he ventured the whispered remonstrance:

"She seems dretful loth to do that work, somehow,—seems ter me I wouldn't insist upon it, 'f I was you."

But by this time, the widow had evidently come to forget the presence of a third person entirely, as, bending over the table, she watched with gleaming, hungry eyes, every motion of the unconscious fingers, her cheeks white with excitement, and her lips tremulous, while muttering from time to time:

"That's it! I see now,—that's the very trick that I couldn't get the hang of."

It was an uncanny sight,—the dimly lighted room, murky with grim shadows, that lurked in every corner, and stretched, grotesque unrealities, across the the unpapered wall, like attendant demons at some unholy incantation, while not a sound broke the unnatural stillness save the labored breathing of the somnambulest, the low rustle of the straws, and the smothered ejaculations of the eager-eyed woman, watching with fierce intentness the placing of every strand, that went to the make-up of poor Roxy's cherished invention.

Nat Graves was by no means a superstitious or even an imaginative man, but the hour, the scene, and above all, the strange power exercised by that stern



willed woman over the helpless sleeper, thrilled him with a vague horror, and oblivious for the moment of everything but a desire to escape from the, to him, revolting sight, he hurried out of the house, without even a word of leavetaking or excuse.

“I honestly b’lieve the widder Jeff’s a witch, or somethin’ worse!” he muttered to himself, as he took the short cut across the fields on his way home.

“There was *murder* in her eyes when she stood over that poor little creature, and if she’d woke up at the wrong time, the Lord only knows what would a’ happened to ’er. It’s a turrible thing f’r one person to have sech a power over another, and,—well, all is, that extra dollar an’ a half may go ter grass, f’r all a’ me. I aint a’ goin’ ter trust my head in the lion’s mouth again, f’r that much.”

And he kept his word.



## CHAPTER IV.

“ET TU BRUTE.”

SOMEWHAT to the girls' surprise, cousin Dorindy had not deigned to show her face in the Rae household for several weeks, and stranger still, her little handmaiden, since her short sojourn there, had never once crossed their threshold. To be sure, Sewell, with a boy's love of the mysterious, declared that he had seen her more than once, in the dusk of evening, hanging about the tree-bordered lane, hiding in the shadows when he came near, and never replying to any salutation or call from him, but to this Roxy gave little thought. The child loved the silence and solitude of Nature, and whenever she could escape from the eye of her harsh taskmistress, nothing delighted her more than a solitary stroll under the friendly shadows, on one of these calm, sweet May evenings, one of her favorite haunts being this same lane, where the wild cherry blooms loaded the air with their cloying sweetness, and the meadow beyond was all alight with the tiny tapers of myriads of flitting fire-flies, that made the dusk luminous with their elfish sparks.

Still, in spite of her reasonings, Roxy could not get the thought out of her head that something might be



amiss with the child. Perhaps Dorindy, who was one of the most jealous souls that ever breathed, might have taken offence at some careless word dropped by them, and innocently repeated by Peg after her return home.

“I know how Dorindy’ll pick anything out of anybody, at the point of a pin, and now she’s a little touchy, I expect, on account of my not fallin’ in with her plans about the straw work. I guess I’ll run over there this evenin’, and so show my good will, for after all, she’s our own kin, and I wouldn’t have any hard feelin’s between us for the world.”

And acting upon her own kindly suggestion,—when the work of the day was laid aside, the hearth clean swept, and the embers in the fireplace carefully covered with ashes, to be ready for the morning’s re-kindling,—Roxy replaced her homespun apron with one of delicately sprigged muslin, and tying over her dark locks a coarse straw bonnet of her own braiding, she started out to make her purposed call.

The sun had already gone down behind the western hills, and the evening shadows were deepening in every clump of alders and cluster of wild cherry trees by the scarce cleared roadside, while the whippoorwill’s mournful call sounded now and then from the near thickets, and the soft, warm air was heavy with the perfume of myrads of night-blooming flowers that, pale, listless, and scentless beneath the bold glare of day, now lifted their delicate chalices honey-full to the brim, to tempt the night moths, one of which,



fluttering aimlessly in the perfumed dusk, brushed the girl's cheek with his outspread wings, then suddenly dropping upon the upturned disc of some beckoning wayside flower, spread wide his plummy sails as if mutely challenging human skill to match his marvelous grace and beauty.

Roxy Rae's life had had little of poetry or outside beauty in it, for, from her childhood it had been one stern, steady, unremitting struggle for the common comforts of life for herself and those dear to her, but there was in her inmost nature a chord that never failed to vibrate to the touch of whatever was fair and sweet about her, although she never dreamed of putting into words the emotions that thrilled her.

And now, she could not but pause a moment, with her feet deep in soft, warm grasses and starry eyed "innocents," to breathe in deep draughts of the pure, sweet scented air, and listen with ear alert, to the low note of the wayside cricket, keeping time with his tiny cymbals to the music of Nature's great orchestra.

"How this rests a body!" she said to herself, with a half guilty feeling as, in the near distance, she caught a glimpse of the light in her cousin's window, and remembered how that coldly practical dame would scorn the idea of anything restful or beautiful in a twilight walk along a common country road.

As she drew near the house she heard through the open window the widow's sharp tones, raised to accommodate the ear of her deaf old mother:

"I tell you there aint no law that can touch me if I



do. I made 'er a fair offer, and she jest laughed in my face; and now I've got the upper hand, with no thanks to her, I shall do the best I can f'r myself. Every tub's got ter stand on its own bottom, and there aint no sense nor reason in her thinkin' she's goin' to get all the profit there is to be made out o' that braid o' hers. I'll—'' She lifted her eyes, and stopped short in her sentence as if suddenly struck dumb, for there in the doorway, with the lamplight shining full upon her astonished and sternly reproachful face, was Roxy Rae herself.

For a full minute neither spoke, and then Mrs. Jeff broke the silence with an embarrassed laugh:

“Why, Roxy, is that you? Walk right in and help yourself to a cheer. Here grandmaam,” addressing a dried up atomy, propped up by pillows in her bed in a far corner of the room, “here's Elbert Rae's Roxy come to see you. Don't ye want ter shake hans with 'er?”

Roxy approached the bed, and the old woman put out a skinny, tremulous hand, with the uncertain motion that characterizes the blind.

“He! he! he!” she gurgled, in a weak, quavering undertone. “Who'd a' thought it,—jest as we was speakin'—”

Her daughter hastily interposed:

“What a stranger you be,” and she drew forward with a great show of hospitality, the big, red cushioned rocking-chair, and motioned her visitor to be seated.

“Do set down, and make yerself comfortable. I was



sayin', only to-day, that I guessed yon'd got above noticin' poor relations, now you're gettin' rich so fast."

"Yes, yes,—*rich*,—that's the word!" put in the old blind woman, mouthing the word between her toothless gums, like a dog gnawing a particularly fine bone. "Money's the thing,—get money, and you'll be *rich*,—yes, *rich*."

Roxy turned away with a feeling of intense disgust struggling with the pity that was always awakened by the sight of this old creature, in whom every passion but that of avarice had long since burned itself out, leaving only the repulsive, scarce conscious clay, to show that life and being were not yet extinct. Then with a decided motion of her hand she put aside the proffered seat.

"No," she said steadily, although her cheeks burned, and her heart throbbed with a feeling strangely compounded of indignation and sorrow. "No, I won't set down in your house, Cousin Dorindy, till I know whether there's to be peace between us or not. What did you mean by the talk I heard you makin' just as I came up to the door?"

The widow turned red and white by turns, while her eyes, refusing to meet the straightforward look of her visitor, were fixed intently upon the knitting that she held in her hand.

"What talk?" she stammered at length. "I don't know what you're drivin' at, I'm sure. I was only tellin' Grandmaam about—my tryin' to get Sally Watson's receipt f'r colorin' red with that new kind o' bark."



That the woman was telling a deliberate falsehood would have been patent to a much less keen observer than her young kinswoman, and the girl could no longer control her natural indignation.

"I know who and what you was talkin' about," she said sternly. "You think you've picked out the secret of my new braid, and now you're plannin' to take the business out of my hands, and crowd me out of it,—deny it if you can!"

"I don't *want* to deny it," and Mrs. Jeff drew herself up defiantly, while a smile of gratified malice replaced the sullen frown with which she had at first listened to the girl's accusation. To do her justice, she was no coward, and now literally girding herself, with hands on hips, for the inevitable conflict, she continued: "I made you a fair offer in the beginnin', as you know, so now you've only yerself to thank if I *do* take up the business, and run it on my own hook. I've been thinkin' f'r some time of enlargin' my millinary business, and now while this braid's the fashion, I calculate 'twill be a good time to start. 'F you'll look there on the secertary at the foot o' Grand-maam's bed, you'll see my new sign that I'm goin' ter hang out to-morrow mornin'. Seth Wyman painted it, and *I* call it a pretty neat thing."

The cool insolence of her tone was more exasperating than the most violent abuse could have been, and the hot Rae blood rose to fever heat in Roxy's veins, and tingled sharply in her very finger tips. But with a strong effort, she suppressed the angry



retort that rose to her lips, and following the direction of her rival's outstretched finger, looked silently at the before unnoticed "sign," as Dorindy had proudly designated it.

The secretary was in the darkest corner of the room, and the light from the one oil lamp was dim and uncertain, yet in spite of the obscurity, those staring black letters upon a white ground, stood out as distinctly before the girl's vision, as if each were, individually, animated by the same evil light that burned in the eyes of the taunting woman beside her.

. . . . .  
 :  
 : MRS. DORINDA HACKETT. :  
 · BONNETS AND HATS MADE AND TRIMMED HERE. ·  
 · NEW MARTHA JEFFERSON STRAWS ·  
 · (AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE RATES.) ·  
 :  
 . . . . .

All unconsciously Roxy read the words aloud, pausing over the concluding ones, with a queer, choking sensation in her throat:

"New Martha Jefferson Straws  
 (at the lowest possible rates.)"

It *couldn't* be!—she must be dreaming. Why, that invention was her own, belonged to her just as much as her hair and eyes, her feet and her hands. It was the child of her brain, and doubly, trebly dear for the many hours of mental effort that it had cost her. She would as soon have thought of Dorindy's stealing Sewell or Prue before her very face, as of her venturing in the broad light of day, before the eyes of the



whole world, to appropriate to her own use this precious possession of another's.

She shut her eyes, clinging dizzily to the back of a chair for support, and hearing indistinctly as from some dim, muffled distance, the voice of the widow:

“ You see there aint no law to hender my usin' the braid, if you *did* invent it.” And the harsh, strained cackle of the old woman, like some wierd, uncanny echo:

“ He! he! he! D'rindy'll keep clear o' the law,—she's cute, she is. He! he!”

Slowly, painfully, the whole significance of her cousin's project and the terrible blow that it must, if carried out, prove to her own modest industry, dawned upon poor Roxy's bewildered brain, and in a voice that was pitifully like the cry of some hurt animal, she exclaimed:

“ Why Dorindy! if you do this you'll just *ruin* my business,—didn't you think of that? ”

Dorindy paused long enough to turn a seam in her knitting, before replying in her usual placid monotone:

“ 'Taint *my* business to look out f'r other folks,—everybody f'r himself in this world, and Old Harry take care o' the hindmost. And supposin' it *should* cut into your trade in the Marthy Jefferson braids, you won't be no worse off than you was before you thought of it. Besides,” with a sneer that the girl felt like a blow upon her hot cheek, “ there's Prue gettin' to be sech a great girl, she might go out spinnin' or doin' housework, same's the Patridge girls do, f'r



instance,—there's plenty o' work in the world f'r them that aint too good to do it."

From that day thenceforward, Roxana Rae never felt the old bewilderment and surprise at the story of any murder committed in the heat of anger. However she might and did condemn the deed, she could understand in a measure the terrible possibilities of even one moment of unrestrained passion, when the evil that may hide unsuspected in the gentlest nature, leaps forth in some unguarded instant, fierce tongued, to destroy that which the repentance of a lifetime can never restore.

But the gentler strain inherited from her quaker-born mother, added to years of practice in the nobler virtues of self control and patient self abnegation, were not without their restraining power in this hour of dire temptation, and scarcely conscious in her keen distress, she cried reproachfully:

"How can thee be so cruel, Dorindy? Thee knows how tender I have been of the child, sparing her all of the roughest and hardest, and how I had planned that this invention of mine would have helped me to make a scholar of her. And now,—*my pretty little Prue to be a drudge in some richer neighbor's kitchen!* I'd work my fingers to the very bone before I'd allow it."

"Highty—tighty!" hooted the old dame. "Seems ter me, f'r beggars, we're gettin' pretty high in the instep. What'd—"

Her daughter with an impatient movement, threw a



corner of the coverlid over her face, checking the connected speech, but not silencing the wicked old tongue, that kept up a spiteful muttering beneath the bedclothes.

To tell the truth, Mrs. Jeff was really a good deal taken aback at this unlooked for outburst of sisterly pride and ambition. To her, Prue was a strong, well grown girl, quite able to earn her own living by the work of her hands, and she had not the smallest conception of the elder sister's prideful tenderness for this, the one bright blossom upon the bare waste of her commonplace life. She ran her knitting-needle through her hair with a puzzled frown, while her eyes watched curiously the tear-stained face, that was now slowly resuming its usual expression of patient determination, and her voice was a trifle less hard as she muttered:

"You needn't flare up like that,—I dunno's Prue's any better'n the rest of us."

"We won't make any more talk about it," interrupted her visitor, drawing her cape a little closer about her shoulders, and shivering, as if the air of the room had all at once taken on an unnatural chill.

"You are doing us a great and cruel wrong in this matter, and you know it. But I believe that somehow and in some way, God will help us, for He says He's the 'father o' the fatherless, and of him that has no helper;' anyhow, I'd rather be in *my* place than *yours*."

She was out of the door, and half way to the gate,



before the widow could rally her bewildered senses to frame a reply to this unexpected assault from her gentle natured kinswoman, while to her old mother's disjointed mutterings she vouchsafed only the curtest and sharpest of replies:

"Of *course* I hadn't nothin' to say. When Roxy begins quotin' Scripture as an argument in business affairs, I know enough ter keep my mouth shet, f'r I've noticed that it's the side that's gettin' the worst of it that always does that. But there's this much about it," with a triumphant chuckle, "she'll find that I aint the woman to be scared, nor driv, nor coaxed out of anything that I've once set my mind on, *so there!*"

Meanwhile, the girl herself, standing for a moment at the little whitewashed gate that separated the widow's front yard from the public highway, with her bonnet pushed back to let the soft evening air cool her hot forehead, struggled hard within herself to gain courage to face without flinching this new and unlooked for calamity that had befallen her.

But for some reason she found it impossible to concentrate her thoughts upon Dorindy's scheme, and the almost certain financial ruin that this portended to herself.

She looked across to the adjoining farmhouse, and noted with a dull curiosity the unusual bustle going on in and about the building, the lights carried hurricdly from room to room, the sound of hammering, and between whiles, the hearty tone of Captain Barden, mingling with those of his ever cheery helpmate.



“The wind’s comin’ round,” and Roxy held up a wet finger to make sure of the direction of the freshening breeze, “so I guess the Sally Barden’s goin’ to sail with the morning tide. I’ve a good mind—”

And she actually took a few steps in the direction of the lighted farmhouse, then suddenly checking herself, with a recollection of the utter uselessness of an appeal to these good friends, in her present strait, she retraced her steps, dragging herself wearily over the very road that, only an hour before, her feet had trodden so lightly, and without the least premonition of the trouble that was to befall her.

But how did Dorindy find out the secret of the braid?

Strangely enough, in her excitement, that question had not before occurred to her, and now, it was as if some one had struck her a sudden blow. She stopped short in her weary walk, her heart beating wildly, and every nerve in her body quivering with indignant astonishment.

It could not be that Peg, the child whom she had befriended by every means in her power, and who had professed to love her so dearly, it *could* not be that *she* had played the traitor, and that knowing the secret, she had imparted it to the woman who, of all the world, had it in her power to injure, perhaps ruin the inventor of it.

It was improbable, and yet, certain things, unnoticed at the time or counted of little consequence, recurred to her mind, and helped to confirm the monstrous suspicion.



Peg's strange avoidance of them all for the last few weeks, and her persistent refusal to answer Sewell's challenge, even while hovering about the cottage, as if longing, yet fearing to look upon the friendly face within, that had never worn a frown for her, all went to prove that the wily widow had succeeded, by fair means or foul, in wringing from the child the secret that she had sworn so solemnly to keep to the death.

There are few things so hard to bear as the defection of one whom we have loved and trusted, frankly and unreservedly, and our poor Roxy now broke down completely, and dropping upon a log by the wayside, she wept bitterly, such tears as neither sorrow, pain, nor disappointment had ever before had power to wring from her brave, patient heart.

The silence and loneliness around her accorded well with her mood, and she found herself thinking with a kind of sad satisfaction, that no human eye or ear was present to disturb with undesired sympathy this hour of her bitterest disappointment and regret, for even now, her strong sense of justice would not allow her to blame unreservedly the guilty child who, she well knew, was but the tool of her unscrupulous mistress. "I ought to have known better myself," she repeated again and again, in an unselfish effort to make poor, erring Peg's fault seem lighter in her own eyes.

"She wouldn't dare, for her life, to go contrary to Dorindy, and I'd no business to give her the *chance* to steal my invention."

As she walked wearily up the lane that led to her



own home, she experienced a feeling of relief at sight of the darkened windows. The children, tired with their day's work, were in bed, and she would not have to share her sad news with them until, by a night's rest she should have gained the needed composure to make as light as possible of this new trouble that threatened them.

No one stirred as she noiselessly lifted the latch, and with stealthy steps sought her own little chamber where, creeping into bed beside her sleeping sister, she lay awake for hours, turning over and over in her mind the puzzling question of how, in the face of this unlooked for drawback, she could carry out her plans in behalf of those dear ones, who naturally looked to her for support and care.

"God helps those who help themselves," repeated again and again, brought a gleam of hope to her disturbed soul, and she slept at last, the sound, dreamless sleep of youth and health.

It was almost morning, for a faint, gray light made objects in the room indistinctly visible, when Roxy started up, wide awake, with a sudden consciousness of another presence in the room beside herself and Prue, of a kiss pressed softly upon her forehead, and tears, not her own, warm upon her cheek.

She started up in bed, trembling all over with vague alarm, but at that moment, a whisper, so soft and low that only herself could by any chance catch its gentle murmur, sounded from the half open door:

"Good-bye, dear Roxy, good-bye."



She knew the voice, choked though it was by tears, and starting from her bed she crept noiselessly to the window and peered eagerly out into the dim gloaming. Not a soul was in sight, and she rubbed her eyes doubtfully, not at all certain if she had been awake or dreaming, yet with a sudden softening of her heart toward the no doubt sorely tempted author of all her trouble.

"Poor little Peg!" she sobbed pityingly, as she returned to her bed, shivering from the chill that always precedes the dawn in our northern clime, "I *couldn't* blame her if I *would*."

And putting her arms tenderly about her own sleeping darling, she prayed the God of the orphan to protect the poor little waif, whose secret remorse and suffering she could easily understand and pity.



## CHAPTER V.

### "I SMELL A RAT!"

DURING the first few weeks following Roxy's interview with the widow several events transpired to render the latter's scheme less harmful to the interests of the Rae's than they had at first apprehended.

To begin with, the whole neighborhood was stirred as one man, when, upon the very day in which the new millinary sign was displayed for the first time, the news spread that Peg, the bound girl was missing, and could not be found although everybody turned out and made a careful search for her in every locality where a body, dead or alive, could by any possibility be concealed.

Questioned by the authorities, Mrs. Jeff reluctantly admitted that the girl had, more than once declared her intention of "making way with herself,"—thus practically acknowledging the hardness of her rule over the unfortunate child,—while with equal reluctance she owned that, for some unexplained reason, the threat had been repeated that very night, although, as she earnestly declared, she had not at the time, had the smallest suspicion that it would be carried out.

To do the widow justice, she was dreadfully distressed over the unaccountable disappearance of her childish



bond slave, but nobody believed in the sincerity of her expressed anxiety, and as the search proved unavailing, people generally, with that natural love for the mysterious and horrible common to the unlearned masses of the remote country districts of the day, began to surmise fearful things regarding the possible fate of the missing child, with often exaggerated stories of her harsh taskmistress' cruelties, until, before long the very atmosphere of the small hamlet was all aquiver with frightful stories,—some even going so far as to hint that the widow, with her own pitiless hands, had made way with the child that she might keep the secret of the new braid in her own possession, (the fact having somehow leaked out that it was through her unwilling aid that Roxy Rae's invention had been stolen).

A lad who often had occasion to pass the widow's house after nightfall in search of a strayed cow, declared that he had on numberless occasions, heard the mistress' voice raised in fierce anger, followed by cruel blows, and the cries and entreaties of the hapless victim.

"It seemed," he explained, "as if Mis Jeff was bound ter make Peg let on 'bout suthen or other, that the gal wouldn't tell on, and she had 'er out in the shed, whalin' 'er ter make 'er give in."

How much of this was fact, and how much pure invention few of the excited townsfolk stopped to find out, and the ball rolled on, gathering size and strength with each revolution, until the suspected woman was



completely ostracised by most if not all of her old neighbors, while more than once, as if to voice the public sentiment, the mischievous urchins of the village had, under cover of the darkness, tried their best to deface the new sign by using it as a target for rotten eggs, mud, and any other unsavory missiles that came to hand.

All this was hard to bear, but Mrs. Jeff was no fool, but a shrewd, worldly wise woman in her way, and she well knew that the very violence of the storm would in time, turn the tide of popular feeling in her favor, by exciting the sympathy of the better part of the community in her behalf.

Unreasoning and lawless violence naturally arouses our indignation in behalf of the sufferer, and almost before we realize it, we begin to find excuses for his sin in sympathy for his sufferings, more especially when as in this case the sin was really hypothetical, without a fragment of proof to uphold it.

So the widow meekly scrubbed the filth from her defaced sign, set a pitcher of pink cheeked wild roses in her front window, and sat herself down in full sight of the highway, patiently and uncomplainingly, with her straw work in hand, while the passer-by at almost any hour of the day might hear her singing a fragment from a well-known hymn which, on account perhaps of a certain devout suggestiveness, was naturally a favorite with her:

“Ye creeping ants and worms,  
His various wisdom show,  
And flies in all your shining swarms,  
Praise him who drest you so.”



There was no effort at retaliation or complaint, and little by little, the good wives of the village, their first indignation over poor Peg's hard fate having had time to cool, and their curiosity getting the upper hand in a longing to inspect the new head gear, of which they could only get tantalizing glimpses from the outside, fell back into the old friendly, neighborly ways, dropping in casually to take a look at the tempting display of ribbons and "artificials" that Mrs. Jeff, with the instinct of a born saleswoman, had arranged with a good deal of taste upon a long table in her pleasant sitting-room, and really, almost before they were themselves conscious of their own inconsistency, the major part of "Those who came to look, remained to—*buy*," until the new straws that, in her enforced solitude, the thrifty dame had contrived to lay in a fair stock of, were quickly disposed of, and in many cases to the very ones who had been loudest in their denunciation of her underhand dealings.

It may be a lamentable fact, but it is none the less true that, one and all, our mental and moral decisions are largely swayed by pocket influence. Easy taxes have kept many a nation in contented servitude to a tyrant, while an added penny of tribute has caused the overthrow of some of the strongest governments of the earth, and the death of uncounted millions of human beings.

Thus Mrs. Jeff, by putting down the price of the Martha Jefferson straws a few cents lower than her rival could afford, secured to herself a goodly share of



the village custom, heedless of the fact that, in so small a community, a business that would have sufficed to yield a fair profit to one, divided between the two, must necessarily prove unsatisfactory and scantily profitable to both.

The summer with its fierce heats and days of hurry and bustle wore away, bringing plenty of work but little ready money to add to Roxy's slender hoard, although all three toiled early and late, to lay up something for the long, dreary winter that would shortly be upon them.

Sewell found almost constant employment with the neighboring farmers, who in most instances found it more convenient to pay him in farm produce, declaring unanimously that it was a bad year for them, with the weevil in the wheat, and potatoes struck with rust, so that for their own ready money they would have to depend entirely upon the hay crop, to carry them through the winter. A state of things that could not be gainsaid, so that the young cottagers were fain to content themselves with a stock of those necessities that would preserve life—for people won't starve on potatoes and salt, while a hot Indian bannock is satisfying to a healthy appetite, even if one is obliged to eat it without butter. A neighbor who was clearing a portion of his forest land by burning it over, was glad to have Sewell carry off all that he would of the charred refuse which, in spite of its unpromising appearance, was a good heat producer, and would keep the big fireplace ablaze all through the winter months, if carefully husbanded.



Prue sold berries and herbs to the housewives of the village, and when these failed, she patiently sought among the briars and brambles of the sheep pastures for every stray lock of wool, all of which Roxy deftly carded and spun into the stout footwear that the coming snow-drifts would make a necessity.

Every device that the elder sister's active brain could contrive, to keep the wolf from their door when the dreaded snows should lie deep upon its threshold, was adopted, while every spare penny was carefully hoarded, and yet, Roxy's brave heart sank within her at thought of the unequal struggle with cold and hunger that her own slender hands would be forced to wage.

With all her ingenuity and skill, she could not without material contrive the clothing absolutely necessary in a climate where the thermometer often stands at twenty below zero even at noonday. Shoes were, for one thing, a necessity, and although Sewell went barefooted long after the early frosts nipped his feet cruelly, his one pair of Sunday shoes were giving out all over, and could not be counted upon as the least protection when the snow should cover the ground. Prue's cloak was so outgrown that she could not by any possibility wear it another winter, and—(of herself she seldom thought, unless warned by unmistakable twinges of rheumatism, that her thin clothing was a poor defence even against the chill of a sharp day in the late autumn).

That Dorindy would not rest until she had secured all the custom of the village, the girl well knew, but



how and in what way she would go to work to accomplish that purpose still remained a secret, dark and threatening, that overhung poor Roxy's waking hours like a cloud of impending calamity and dread. The farmer's wives and daughters in the outlying districts still brought their scant custom to her, and a few of the village matrons, as if to make up for their defection in the way of straw work, employed her now and then upon a small job of netting or fine needlework, but beyond an occasional coarse straw hat for some school or farm boy, she could count upon little or nothing from the source nearest home. If to her native ingenuity, good taste, and skill, she had added something of her cousin's shrewdness and business capacity, she might even now have managed to reclaim a large part of the custom that had drifted away from her, but like most inventive natures she lacked the inborn cunning of a successful business woman, nor had she learned how to approach her fellow mortals on the blind side. She would have scorned to practice the small deceits, even if they had occurred to her, that came so natural to the widow Jeff, and went so far towards making her wares desirable in the eyes of her flattered customers, while at the same time, she could not quite conceal the bitterness engendered by the defection of her old friends, who were only too glad to excuse themselves by accusing her of wanting to dictate to them who they should buy their wares of. If Mrs. Jeff could afford the straws ten cents cheaper than her cousin, why shouldn't they buy of her? Why, indeed! and



poor Roxy's sore heart got many a thoughtless thrust from those who should have known better than to add an iota to what she was already bearing.

One chilly day in October, Sewell came home from a neighboring village where he had gone on an errand for a friendly farmer, and unmindful of his usual merry greeting to the small household, sat soberly down before the kitchen fire, and with a furtive glance at his sisters, remarked, in a tone of suppressed excitement:

"I saw something in Parker's store over to the Corners, that'd make your eyes stick out, I guess."

Prue dropped her sewing, and Roxy's foot paused for an instant upon the treadle of her flax wheel as, with anxious faces, both asked in a breath:

"What was it, Sewell? Do tell."

Poor souls, the last few months had had nothing but ill news for them, and the boy's face and tone were ominous of some new trouble. No wonder that Roxy's brave voice quavered a little as she put the question.

Sewell rubbed his hands slowly together, but he did not remove his eyes from the smouldering fire over which he was bending.

"Well, you see, while Parker was putting up the things, I took a look round at the notices stuck up in the store. There was two of vandoos, one at Homans' and the other a lot of stock that a man down to the Crick wanted to sell; and old Bandy the shoemaker had posted his runaway 'prentice, while another man, (I forget his name,) wanted to sell a hive o'



bees. I'd spelled 'em all out, and was jest startin' for the door to see what was goin' on outside, when all at once I saw, right on the inside o' the door, in great big starin' letters:

### ATTENTION!

MARTHA JEFFERSON STRAWS.

I jumped as if I'd been kicked in eend, and I tell you my heart come right up in my mouth, when I saw 'twas a notice o' Dorindy's, claimin' that she was the only one that could braid these straws, and offerin' to supply all kinds of straw work besides. Then at the end she offered to take 'prentices to learn the trade."

Roxy turned very pale but she did not speak, while Prue was loud in her indignation:

"The mean old thing! Just like her to steal all the trade from us, (for she knows that the Corner folks have always got Roxy to do their straw work.) Isn't there any way," and she turned appealingly to her sister, "that you can put a stop to her using this invention of yours to ruin us?"

Roxy sadly shook her head, and something like despair looked out of her tired eyes, as she said huskily:

"Nothing, child—nothing. I've been all over the ground again and again, and I don't see a single thing that I can do."

Sewell interposed.

"Parker says you ought to get a patent on your



braid, and then nobody could make or teach it without payin' you for the privilege. He seemed to know all about it," in reply to his sister's look of surprise, and when he saw me readin' the notice, he come along "and begun to ask me something about the way Dorindy got holt of it. But I guess," the boy added as an afterthought, "that he must a' been jokin' about the patent, for he laughed when he said it."

"Yes, he meant it for a joke, most likely," returned Roxy, with such a new, strange bitterness in her tones that the children stared at her in silent wonder. They could not know how cruelly the iron had entered into her soul, and how utterly hopeless the future looked, stretching out before her one unending waste of dreary poverty and toil. Neither did they know, (she had spared them that humiliation,) that, urged by her good friend, Mrs. Cap'n Sol, she had ventured to consult Squire Biddle upon the question of applying for a patent, and had come away from the interview completely disheartened and humiliated by the unconcealed contempt with which that astute expounder of the law had regarded her timid appeal to the protection provided for her more favored brothers.

"You must understand, my good girl, that the Patent Office is a *great institution*, and it takes a sight o' money to run it. Now if they should take up every little insignificant notion, like a braid o' straw for instance, there wouldn't be no whoa to the calls they'd have made on 'em. They'd be overrun with



folks claimin' a patent on everything, from a new kind o' tow-boat run by steam, to a talking rag baby. Besides," and he stroked complacently his thin crop of pepper-and-salt whiskers, the undeniable badge of sexual superiority, "it ain't a woman's place to put 'erself forrud in such things. There aint never been no patent granted to a woman in this country yet, and it's *my* opinion that 'twill be a long day before there is."

And as if this were not enough to deter the daring female who would lay her unhallowed hand upon the protective ark of the nation, he put the possibility of a patent still farther out of her reach by an array of figures in the shape of costs, that struck our inexperienced little country maiden fairly dumb with consternation.

Why, his own fee as agent in the case, would more than cover her small savings for an entire season, to say nothing of the sum that must be paid to the authorities at Washington.

She might as well submit to be robbed by Mrs. Jeff as to spend all her savings in a fruitless endeavor to protect her rights, and as she span diligently, her woman's wits occupied themselves in a vain endeavor to solve the question as to what her individual rights, as a non-voting citizen of this great Republic really *were*. Could she be robbed with impunity of the thought born in her own brain, simply because that brain was not the brain of a man?

Sewell had by this time forgotten the depression of



an hour before, and as he busied himself with popping corn in the ashes, chatted merrily with Prue, laughing now and then at some lively sally of that small damsel and apparently as free from care for the future as the gray kitten purring contentedly on the hearth at his feet.

“If *he* ever invents anything,” she thought, with a strong sense of injustice hot at her heart, “there is a law in the land to protect him in his right to it, while I—”

She resolutely put the thought aside, and as resolutely forced herself to join in the children's idle gossip. It were better not to think at all, where thought brought only distraction and bitter unrest. Perhaps—thousands have thought so, both before and after her, and yet—thought went on and is advancing still.

That the widow's sagacity had not been at fault was soon proved. Her advertisement had caught the attention of the public, not only at the Corners but in all the outlying districts, in every one of which her notice had been shrewdly posted, and quite a commotion was raised among the unemployed widows and maids, especially in regard to the offer of receiving apprentices.

Mrs. Jeff had plenty of applications, but in this, as in everything else, her natural shrewdness moved her to the selection of the Partridge twins, who, to considerable natural taste and ingenuity, added the desirable qualification of belonging to one of the most prosperous neighborhoods within the town's limits.



More than this, Plumy was the acknowledged belle of the little community where she lived, and naturally all the lesser lights sought to imitate her in dress, manners, etc., so that she would not only be a fine figurehead upon which to display her wares, and thus tempt a wavering customer, but would help to make Mrs. Jeff's establishment the fashionable center for all the femininity of Bestport. To be sure her twin sister Puff had neither beauty nor vivacity to recommend her, but she was a steady-going, quiet creature, and could be made useful in a variety of ways, for Mrs. Jeff had no idea of spending her precious time in teaching these girls a business, that in her heart, she had not the least intention of giving them the opportunity to learn.

Apprentices of that day were supposed to have their board and instruction for their services, and in return they were expected to make themselves useful in any way that suited the convenience of their master or mistress. This was a great modification of the old English system, introduced by our fathers, who, in addition to the tyro's services, usually received a fee, varying in size with the relative importance of the trade to be learned. Thus it never occurred to the Partridge girls to resent the task laid upon them by Mrs. Jeff, of sitting by turns in Granny's room, and while busied with their straw work, keeping the old dame company, or attending to her small wants when requested to do so.

For a long time, even the sharp-eyed Plumy failed



to notice that, just at the critical point in the new braiding pattern, Mrs. Jeff invariably "changed hands," or rather, "girls," insisting that Granny's sentinel should be relieved by her sister at that precise moment, so that the real secret of the braid still remained a secret, even after long weeks of faithful apprenticeship on the part of the defrauded Partridges.

Naturally Plumy was the first to discover and resent this breach of faith on the part of the widow, and poor Puff, who was of the easy-going sort, was cheated out of many an hour of coveted sleep by her sister's indignant complaints.

"Here we've brought 'er in *slats* o' custom," growled the dissatisfied one, putting her lips close to the ear of the would-be sleeper, for fear of being overheard, "and didn't she agree to learn us how to do that new braid? And here she's kept us on them old, nasty, common straws, that we knew how to do long before we came under her roof. I say its a cheat all through, keepin' us tendin' out on that old skilaton in the bedroom. Oh, I say, Puff," with a sudden change of mood, "*did* you ever hear such an old cackler in all your life?"

Puff was wide awake now, for this was a topic that interested her far more than Mrs. Jeff's shortcomings.

"The rhymes that she strings off are enough to make a cat laugh," she returned, with a sympathetic giggle.

"You remember old grandma Stacy, when she'd lost 'er senses, she used ter say over verses from the



hymn-book by the yard, all night long sometimes, but this one's verses are all the tail end of riddles and rhymes, as old as the hills. She'll lay there, and mutter over and over, a dozen times a day:

‘The earth did quake,  
My heart did ache,  
To see what a hole the two-legged fox did make.’”

Both girls laughed, but Plumy, who was fond of the mysterious, shuddered slightly.

“You don't s'pose now, Puff, that she *means* anything by that, *do* you?”

Puff drew a long breath.

“I dunno what she *could* mean, I'm sure, but I heard her call the widder a 'two-legged fox' one day, when she heard 'er tellin' about an extra good trade she'd made.”

The girls were silent for some seconds, and then Plumy put a trembling arm about her sister and whispered fearfully:

“What do you s'pose ever become o' that bound girl o' hers?”

Puff shuddered.

“*Don't*, Plumy! You're enough to scare the wits out of a body. Come, let's go to sleep.”

But the next day, being again on guard in Granny's room, the conversation of the night before was recalled to the mind of the timid Partridge by the old woman's disconnected mutterings, and creeping close to the bed, she asked curiously:

“Say, Granny, who was the fox?”



The old woman cackled gleefully—she evidently enjoyed the idea of that rarity, an interested listener:

“My little sister picked my bones,  
And buried me under the marble stones.”

And she laughed again, with such satanic glee that, terrified, the girl scuttled back to her seat by the one window, just in time to escape the eye of her mistress, who, attracted by the old woman's raised voice, had hastened to put a stop to her inconvenient chatter.

“Do shut up, mother,” she cried impatiently, and with a slight shake of the withered shoulder, “You make such a racket that you'll disturb the customers.”

“Well, well,” grumbled the old creature viciously, “Spos'n I do? Ye'd better bury *me* under the marble stones, hadn't ye?”

Temper had actually given her the power to concoct an intelligible sentence, and her daughter stared at her for a moment, with a look that the suspicious Puff, decided in her own mind to be one of terrified guilt, although there was nothing unnatural in her tones, as she said, rather more sharply than was her wont:

“Puff, you can come and help me now on the lining of old Miss Lee's bunnit, and let Plumy spell yo awhile here.”

But the plumes of the Partridges had been rudely ruffled, while that peculiar instinct that prompts certain natures to scent a mysterious horror in the most commonplace phenomena of nature, was thoroughly aroused, making the aimless babblings of a demented



old woman assume the dignity and importance of a varitable revelation, and awaking in their souls a burning curiosity, with a determination to sift the matter so thoroughly that the evil, whatever it might be, should be unearthed, to the discomposure of the guilty party, and their own eternal glorification as the sharpest and keenest-witted maidens in all Bestport.



## CHAPTER VI.

### “MAN’S EXTREMITY.”

THE winter came in that year early and fierce, and by the middle of November the air was thick with falling snow, that the weak rays of the far-off sun had no power to melt, as it filled up the hollows and lay an unbroken waste of chilly whiteness over all the dreary landscape.

Even those favorite country merrymakings the jolly husking-bees, were for this time omitted, as the barns were too cold for the hardy huskers to find any pleasure in their pleasant toil, and the farmer and his boys worked with downturned caps and upturned coat-collars, at the monotonous task of stripping the dry husks from the ripened ears, while the gay crowd of lads and lasses that was wont at this season to crowd around the cider presses, to taste the honeyed nectar fresh from the fruit, and indulge in the rustic gallantries that such an occasion was sure to offer, was for once missing.

Still there was no want of good cheer in the comfortable farm-houses, and the great brick ovens groaned with their load of good things, prepared in anticipation of the forthcoming day of public Thanksgiving to the Lord of the Harvest, the one day of all the



year that the genuine New Englander allowed himself to take his case, and feast to his heart's content, undisturbed by any twinges of conscience, or a fear of unfriendly comment from some more diligent neighbor.

For the first time in all her life Roxy Rae could make no special preparation for this universal holiday, and although neither of the children referred to it, eating their frugal dinner of baked potatoes and fried salt pork, with as cheery an air as if it had been the prescribed turkey or chicken dinner with which the occasion had always been celebrated, even in their humble household, poor Roxy could not for the life of her keep back the tears that would not let her swallow a mouthful of the coarse, homely fare.

Still, poverty and toil bravely shared are a wonderful strengthener of family ties, and it was after all a great comfort to the elder sister's sore heart to see the cheerful courage with which the children accepted the unusual deprivation.

"Do you know," Sewell remarked, unbuttoning the brown jacket of an uncommonly mealy potatoe, and regarding the smoking tuber with an approving eye, "do you know what I heard Deacon Potter say last night when I was waitin' in the store for that salt you sent me for?"

The girls looked up inquiringly.

"Well, I heard him tell Nap Tinker, that's been working for him, off and on, f'r years, that he shouldn't want him after this month, the times was so



hard that he'd concluded to get along with a boy. Thinks I, 'Here's a job for you, Sewell Rae,' so when I got a chance, I jest said to the Deacon that, if he was going to hire a boy, I'd like a job."

"What did he say?" cried both girls in eager concert.

"Well, you know the Deacon's one o' the slow kind, takes a good while to make up his mind, and f'r all of five minutes he never said a word, kept right on weighing sugar and tea, and doing up bundles, but at last, says he, in his good-natured way: 'Well, sonny, come up to the house to-morrow evenin' and we'll talk the matter over.'"

"Oh Sewell, if you *should* get the chance!" and as Prue clapped her hands childishly, Roxy noted with a secret pain how very thin and transparent they had grown, the pretty plumpness of which she had been so proud was fast disappearing, and her heart stood still for a moment with a new and terrible anxiety.

Could it be that Prue, who had inherited her mother's delicacy of constitution along with her rare personal beauty, had begun to droop beneath this unwonted weight of care and worry?

She remembered the fatal hectic upon her mother's fair cheek, and with terrified eyes she searched the dear face opposite for the fatal sign. But Prue was now all animation, talking eagerly with Sewell upon the possibilities of his securing the place in the Deacon's store.



“The very first thing that you will have to get is a pair of shoes for yourself, you can’t go back and forth through the snow in these old scows, and then—well, really, Roxy ought to have a new gown. If it can be contrived in any way. It’s too bad for her, hard as she works, to go with that old patched and darned bombazine, that was made out of grandmaam’s to begin with.”

Roxy smiled through her scarce dried tears.

“He hasn’t got the place yet,” she gently reminded them, “and if he does get it, I don’t believe the Deacon will pay him much more than will clothe him decently. You see, in a store, he’ll have to go better dressed than he would here to home. But,” reassuringly, as she saw the disappointed look upon their bright young faces, “If he earns enough to feed and clothe himself comfortably that will be a big lift to us all.”

That night the girls sat up long after the usual hour, waiting in nervous expectation for Sewell’s return from his interview with the Deacon, and trying hard, when they at last caught the sound of his approaching steps, to interpret the news he brought by the haste or slowness of them. Prue flew to open the door, and one look at his shining face reassured the anxious watchers, even before he could find breath to say:

“Hooray! its all right. The Deacon has hired me for the winter at any rate, and he says,” pausing a moment to divest himself of cap and mittens, “if I’m faithful and industrious, p’raps he’ll keep me right on and learn me the business.”



Roxy thought of that college scheme, that now seemed so utterly impracticable, and sighed softly, but she said nothing, and the boy went on excitedly:

“He'll give me nine shillings a week and my board to begin with, and if he finds me worth it, he'll raise my pay to two dollars, as soon as the times is a little easier.”

Prue exclaimed delightedly, but there was a note of disappointment in Roxy's tones, as she said, with a fond look at the boy's glowing face:

“I wish that he could have paid you enough so that you could a' staid at home with us. The Deacon and his wife are real clever folks, and they'll do as well by you as if you was their own, but I *do* hate to break up our own family.”

Sewell laughed lightly.

“Why Roxy!” and he caught his sister about her waist, and gave her a hug that would have done credit to a young bear; “'taint ten minutes walk from here to the Deacon's, and I shall see you every day of our lives. Talk about breaking up the family, why, I'm goin' to work on purpose to *keep* the family together. There's only one thing,” and his boyish face was overclouded for a moment, “and that is, I hate to take poor Nap Tinker's place away from him. He looked dreadfully down in the mouth when I met him to-day, and no wonder, with that sick wife o' his and their seven children—the oldest aint fourteen yet. I don't see how they're going to get through the winter, f'r my part, for I don't believe he's been able to lay



up a cent—he's weakly, and aint never had a man's full wages."

Roxy shook her head with a troubled air.

"That seems to be most always the trouble," she said thoughtfully. "What's one man's good fortune, seems to be another's loss. It's just as if in climbing a ladder, you had to pull down the one above you to get his place, and that don't seem right to me, somehow. There's such a lot of work to do in the world, that there *ought* to be something for everybody to do. Now the Deacon's a well-to-do man, and has a good many irons in the fire, and it seems to me that he might find work for both of you to do, without any loss to himself."

Sewell rubbed his hands, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I heard him tell Mis Potter that he'd offered Nap a job at peelin' bark, if he'd take his pay out o' the store, but he hadn't said whether he'd try it or not."

"The poor man is half crippled with rheumatism," observed Prue, "and workin' in the woods, with the snow up to his knees half the time, wouldn't be a very payin' job for him, I shou'd say. But, Sewell, do you s'pose Phebe Potter'll ask us to any of her parties this winter? She did, to one or two last winter, but Roxy hadn't anything decent to wear, and I wouldn't go without her."

And thus diverted from the subject of poor Nap Tinker's troubles, the little group chatted cheerfully, planning and contriving, with sisterly pride, how to



make the boy's scant wardrobe look decent and respectable in the eyes of his employer and his family.

Quick and willing, the lad soon proved himself a useful helper in the store, while his unvarying good nature and natural courtesy made him a prime favorite in the pleasant home, presided over by the Deacon's comely wife, who, in her turn, was completely under the rule of her pretty daughter, the youngest and only unmarried one of her numerous flock. That it was to Phebe Potter, although indirectly, that Sewell owed his position in her father's store, he had not the least idea, and yet such was the case, for, had it not been for that young woman's housewifely vanity, Napoleon Tinker would still have been weighing sugar and tea at the familiar counter, while Sewell would, without doubt have been occupying himself with the honest, but by no means profitable employment of running errands for the neighborhood, with an occasional job at shelling corn or beans for some idly disposed farmer.

For several years past, the girl had labored hard but in vain to convince her father that the furniture of the "front room" which, spick and span, on his marriage day, had been the admiration of the town, was now too shabby and old fashioned to be decent, and that a newer and more modern carpet, with other accessories in the shape of window draperies and a sofa, were absolutely essential to the respectability of the establishment. This fall she had made up her mind to a final and decisive effort, and aided and abetted by her indulgent mother, had decided upon a



plan that, she felt sure,—knowing her father's peculiarities,—could not fail of success.

Very wisely she approached the subject, by declaring her determination to do the fall spinning herself, instead of hiring Plumy Partridge as usual.

“I can save that much,” she modestly declared, “and with such a hard winter before us, every little saved counts.”

The Deacon was delighted, for this matter of hiring the spinning done, had been a bone of contention in the family ever since Miss Phebe, having arrived at woman's estate, had strongly objected to doing it herself. And now he patted her head admiringly:

“That's a good, sensible girl,” he said, “and you'll deserve a new gown, the first time I go to Boston.”

Miss Phebe smiled, and shook her curly head decidedly:

“Oh, land, no! I don't really need a new gown, father,—but if you want to make me the very happiest girl in all Bestport,”—and a plump arm crept coaxingly about the good Deacon's neck,—“get me those things that I've been wanting so long for the best room. It won't cost such a dreadful sight of money after all, and a good set, such as I want, ought to last a lifetime. Don't say no,” she insisted, as he tried to speak, “just let me tell you of a way in which it can be done, and you none the worse off, after all. Why can't you let Tinker go, and get a good, smart boy to help you in the store this winter? You say that it'll be a hard winter, and if so, trade'll be dull, and a



boy'll be all the help you'll need. Now reckon up what you'll save in that way, and what I'll save on the spinning, and you'll find that together we'll save pretty near enough to get the things we want for the parlor."

The Deacon hemmed and hawed, but he was fairly caught, for we all know that a problem social or domestic, mathematically worked out, can not be disputed, and half reluctantly, he yielded to his daughter's wishes, dismissed poor Tinker, installed Sewell in his place, and took upon his own shoulders a number of extra duties that, owing to his advancing years, he had felt himself excusable in delegating to his employee.

He was a kind hearted man, and it cost him no little regret to turn off the clerk who, if somewhat incapable, had been honestly devoted to his interests, but really there seemed no help for it as things stood now, and nobody could blame him for trying to retrench somewhat these hard times. That his love for his pretty daughter, and his natural desire to please her should influence him to take from his neighbor his actual means of subsistence never even occurred to him as a wrong or unchristian act. Perfectly familiar as he was with our Lord's saying: "He who loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me," he had never dreamed that it could be applied to his own case. No indeed,—*that* was meant, beyond doubt for the strengthening of those sorely tempted early christians, who, in proclaiming their love for the despised Nazarene, tore asunder the tenderest ties of human relationship, and to find Christ lost all of earthly love and honor,—everything that had made this life enjoyable.



He was a good man, benevolent, kind hearted, and conscientious, but that doctrine of the *divided* coats had not yet reached his inner consciousness. He would have felt that he had the right to *both* coats, so long as the chances of trade and barter enabled him to indulge in that number, while his needy neighbor would have been perfectly welcome to any odd waistcoat for which he had himself no farther need, and it really went to his heart when, one day in surly midwinter, he saw the whole family of his former clerk,—the father included,—crowded into a rough pung, drive past the store, en route for the poorhouse.

Nat Graves, who chanced to be standing by the door, glanced thoughtfully through the glass panel, and in reply to the Deacon's pitying ejaculations, remarked dryly:

"There goes the last chance for makin' men out of the Tinkers."

The Deacon looked at him inquiringly:

"Yes, this N'poleon Tinker's the only one o' the whole tribe that's ever made any shift to take care of himself. These things run in the blood, and the Tinkers are naterally a breed o' paupers. Now this man's mother was a Twiggs,—one o' the Gouldsboro Twiggs, an honest, hard workin' lot,—and this son of hers has got something of her in him, or he wouldn't a' fit shy o' the poorhouse so long as he has. *Now* he's gone the way of all the rest, and if he lives to come out in the spring, he'll have lost all self respect and ambition, while his children will grow up with the stain o' the



poorhouse on 'em, and the town 'll have Tinkers to support till the race dies out."

"He had a job of peelin' bark,—" began the Deacon, but the other interrupted him:

"Yes, I know all about that,—a weakly man, fit for nothin' but indoor work, and half fed at that, aint likely to thrive on peelin' bark out in the woods, with the weather cold enough to take the hair right off o' yer scalp, and nothin' but thin summer clo'es to protect 'im. That's where he got the rhumatic fever that laid 'im up, so't they had to call on the town for help. You might jest as well expect a toothless dog to thrive on brown bread crusts, as to set a man at gettin' a livin' out o' what he aint fitted for, and can't do, let him try ever so hard."

The Deacon rubbed his lean knee regretfully:

"I wish't I'd known they was so hard up," he said, then sinking his voice, and looking as sheepish as a schoolboy caught stealing apples, he added: "I *did* give 'em a barrel o' flour, and some pork and codfish the first o' the winter, f'r I mistrusted they'd be havin' a pretty tight squeeze to get through the cold weather, and if I'd known I'd—"

"Of *course* you would, Deacon,—you needn't tell me that you'd put yer hand down deep into yer pocket any time to help a neighbor in distress, everybody knows that, shy as you are about yer alms-giving."

And the good fellow laughed mischievously at his friend's embarressment, for none knew better than he how literally the kindly old man obeyed the injunction to do his alms in secret, and not to be seen of men.



“But, Deacon,” and he tapped thoughtfully upon the edge of the counter against which he was leaning, “in such a case, givin’ is like pourin’ water into a seive, you’ve got to *keep on pourin’*, or they’re right back agin in the same hard sleddin’. Do you know that the poorhouse aint never been so full as ’tis this winter?”

Graves was one of the selectmen of the town, and as such, an authority upon town matters,—the Deacon nodded intelligently:

“It’s a hard winter,” he sighed. “We aint seen nothin’ like it f’r the last ten years, at least.”

“Jest so,—and that means heavier taxes.”

“Ye-es, I s’pose so,—of *course* it does.”

“And you’re one o’ the largest tax payers in town. Now there’s N’poleon Tinker, and his wife, and seven children,—not one of ’em in decent shape to do a stroke o’ work, on account o’ the hard grind they’ve been through, and what you’ll have to pay, as an individual, to’ards their support,—includin’ the doctor’s bill, of course,—would a’ gone a long ways towards payin’ the poor man’s wages here in the store. And that aint the worst of it, by a long chalk, What little manhood he had in ’im ’ll be pauperized out of ’im, instead o’ being encouraged as ’twould a’ been if he’d had the chance, however small, to earn an honest livin’. And I wouldn’t be afraid to bet a good deal (if I was a bettin’ man,) that your children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren, perhaps, ’ll have to help support pauper Tinkers, long after you an’ I are dust.”

The Deacon scratched his head reflectively:



“Well,—I declare! if that aint an idea that never struck me in that light before. But,” with a sudden brightening, “there’s Sewell,—*he* needed the place full as bad as Nap did, far’s I can see.”

“Couldn’t you have found work for *both*, and let your old bones have a little of the rest they need, at your time o’ life?”

“Ye-es, I spose so. But you see, trade’s dull, and,—well, the fact is, I’d promised my women folks that I’d get some new fixin’s f’r the best room, in the spring, and I really felt as if I must economize, to do it with a clear conscience. You see how ’tis?”

“Of course *I* do, but how do you s’pose it looks to that poor feller on his hard bed, over to the poorhouse? More’n likely he’d be unreasonable enough to think that the new furnitoor could a’ waited a year or two longer, better than he could stand bein’ thrown on the town, f’r want of a job, that he was willing and anxious to do.”

Sewell had listened to this conversation with the keen interest of a bright, thoughtful boy, and that evening, sitting before the fire in his own home, with Roxy alone for company,—Prue had fallen into a habit of late, of creeping off to bed long before the usual hour,—he repeated, in substance, the arguments put forward by Nat Graves in the matter of a man’s duty, as an honest citizen, to do all in his power to prevent pauperism. As he talked, Roxy’s tears fell silently, and as he concluded with:

“I’m *so* glad that there aint never been any paupers



in *our* family. I b'lieve I'd jest about starve before I'd ask the town's help, unless I was so old or sick that I *couldn't* work."

The sobs that she could no longer suppress shook her from head to foot, as she cried wildly:

"But to see the one you love better'n your own life fadin' away before your very eyes just for want of nourishin' food. *That* makes you forget pride and the speech o' people,—everything, but how and where you're goin' to get her what she must have, or—*die*."

The boy's face was white even to his lips, as crossing over to where his sister sat, he put his arm tenderly about her shoulders, and laid his cheek, with a half-suppressed sob upon her bowed head.

"Oh Roxy! *is* it so bad as *that*?"

She nodded, for she could not speak.

"And here am I," he cried bitterly, "livin' on the fat o' the land—setting down three times a day to a table fairly crowded with good things, while you and little Prue"—

He broke down completely, and Roxy was aroused from her own helpless grief to play her usual part o' comforter.

"Don't take on so child! You aint to blame because the Deacon sets a good table for his family and help. And then, really, we haven't gone *hungry*, you know, for there's plenty of potatoes, and pork, and meal in the house, only Prue has been kind of ailin' of late, ever since she took that dreadful cold pickin' over husks in Mis Cornishes' barn, and that makes



her kind of fussy about her vittles, so she's all the time pinin' for things that I can't get. Eggs are high, and I've tried everywhere to buy a chicken and pay for it in work, but nobody has any to spare, or any work to do, for that matter. I'm workin' now on a muslin cape that'll be a beauty when it's done, but I don't know who in the world will buy it for anything like what it's worth."

Sewell sighed dejectedly:

"If I only had a little money of my own, but I had to have so many new things to wear when I went into the store that the Deacon advanced the money for, and I aint got it al paid up yet,"

"Yes, yes, I understand all about that," his sister hastened to explain, "and I didn't mean to burden you with my troubles, but somehow my heart got so full that it couldn't hold any more, and I *had* to speak out to somebody, I couldn't bear it alone no longer."

"It's *awful* to be so poor," muttered the boy, with a touch of natural irritability, "and there's Dorindy, the old thief! pilin' up the money, hand over fist, that, by good rights should belong to you. But I guess, after all," he added, in a tone of undeniable satisfaction, "that she's got a hornet in her nest that'll sting 'er into rememberin' her sins, if nothin' else does."

Roxy looked up inquiringly, her tear-stained face expressing a languid curiosity.

"What do you mean? I haven't heard anything."

"Why, I heard Mis Potter and Phebe talking about it, and they said that the Partridge girls got mad with



her becaused she didn't do the square thing by them, struck off work, and wouldn't serve their time out, and now they're rakin' up that old story about the widder's makin' away with Peg. Plumy told Phebe the other day that she could *prove* that the child was murdered and buried in the cellar, and that she'd swear to it in any court o' justice in the land."

"Cat's foot!" cried Roxy, with scornful incredulity "That's too ridiculous for anybody in their sober senses to believe. Besides, didn't she come to me that very night she disappeared and say good-bye? 'Tain't likely she went right back and put 'erself into Dorindy's hands to be killed."

"I told Mis Potter about that, and she hinted, didn't say right out, for she's a dretful cautious woman, and never likes to commit herself, but she hinted that it *might* be a *spirit* that you saw ruther'n the child herself. She said that 'twaant an uncommon thing for murdered folks to come back to say good-bye to their friends, or haunt their murderer.

"I don't believe a word of it," persisted Roxy, whose strong sense of justice overbore her natural resentment against her rival.

"Dorindy's harsh and hard as shingle nails, especially in a business way, but she aint a monster, to go to work deliberately and plan a *murder*,—that's *too* unlikely."

Sewell wagged his head with a non-committal air. There was something fascinating in the ghostly possibility hinted by the Deacon's wife, and so long as it



was Dorindy who was under suspicion, he thoroughly enjoyed retailing the gossip that he had picked up from various sources.

“As to that, I guess nobody really thinks she killed 'er a' *purpose*. The ginral idea seems to be that she got mad and struck 'er harder'n she meant to, and when she found she was dead, she was so scared that she hid her body in the cellar. Nat Graves says he saw her one night with his own eyes, make Peg, who was walkin' in her sleep, do all sorts o' things, knit and braid straw ”—

“What?”

Roxy's cheeks glowed, and an eager light burned in her dark eyes, as she cried excitedly:

“That's it! I see now how Dorindy got the secret of that braid out of the child, and I—I blamed the poor little thing, and called her a traitor in my heart.”

Her voice was tremulous with emotion, and she scarcely heeded the boy's concluding words, in her glad surprise over this unlooked for proof of Peg's innocence.

“Graves said he trembled at the time, for fear the child would wake up while she was to work on her, f'r he could see by her face that she was terribly strung up, and wouldn't really sense what she was about; supposin' the girl should wake up at the wrong minute.”

Poor little Peg! And long after Sewell was gone, Roxy sat alone over the decaying fire, no longer absorbed in her own anxieties and cares, but fruitlessly



wondering over the child's mysterious disappearance, and hoping almost against hope, that the wretched, sorely wronged outcast might have found some friendly shelter for her unprotected head.



## CHAPTER VII.

### “IS GOD’S OPPORTUNITY.”

“THE fact is, she’s sick and notional, and won’t hear to havin’ anybody tend out on ’er but you.”

Captain Sol looked appealingly into Roxy’s grateful face, as if instead of conferring a favor, he was humbly soliciting one.

“You see I’ve got to start f’r New York by to-morrow at the fartherest, and now I’ve turned that thievin’ old Bet Wiggins adrift, I’m bound to leave things shipshape in the home craft, and with you at the hellum, and that Partridge lass—the pretty one—in the steward’s berth, I don’t see no reason why it shouldn’t be plain sailin’ whilst I’m away.”

Roxy smiled, and a warm glow overspread her wan face as she said timidly:

“I’ll be only too glad to go if—if I can take Prue along with me. You can reckon her board to me,” she added hastily, lest their good friend should think for an instant that she wanted to foist her sister upon them as a condition of her own acceptance of the welcome task of caring for the Captain’s sick wife.

Yes, yes, of *course*, that’s understood. Mis Bardin told me to tell you that she had a whole barrel of



carpet rags waitin' to be sewed, and if Prue wanted to, she could work her passage on them."

That night, two of the most grateful hearts in all Bestport sent up a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father in Heaven, who had sent his angel in the person of a sturdy, weather-beaten, Yankee skipper, to shut the mouth of the dreaded wolf at their door, and reassure their failing trust in His oft-repeated promises of protection to the fatherless and undefended.

Mrs. Barden, or "Mis Cap'n Sol," as the country folk called her, had been ill all through the winter, of a low, nervous fever, that had left her weak, whimsical, and often hard to please, although the Captain had dutifully spent the weeks of an uncommonly long vacation from his sea duties, in constant attendance upon her, humoring all her whims, and puzzling his somewhat clumsy wits in a vain attempt to invent dishes to tempt her mental as well as her bodily appetite. But it had been up-hill work, and now that the summons had come for him to rejoin his vessel, it was the invalid herself who had proposed installing Roxy Rae as her nurse and companion.

"She's a good, sensible little soul, knows when to speak, and when to hold her tongue," was Mrs. Sol's blunt summary of the girl's qualifications, and the good Captain never dreamed of resenting the scathing emphasis placed by his outspoken helpmeet upon the concluding item. He had done his best, and he knew how to make allowance for the unreasonable



pettishness of sick folks, and now with a lightened heart, he bade adieu to home and home ties, and sailed away for a three-months voyage, serenely unconscious that, in a small way he was helping to carry out the great scheme of mutual helpfulness upon which the prosperity of a whole world ever has, and ever must depend.

To the two girls, their transfer from a life of pinching economies and wearing anxieties, to the cheery atmosphere of Cap'n Sol's well ordered home, was like being translated bodily into another sphere, and even the sick woman's occasional fretfulness never in the least disturbed the serenity of her patient little nurse, whose bright face was, unconsciously, a better tonic to the depressed invalid than all the bitter messes that the village doctor so faithfully dosed her with.

It was pleasant too, to have somebody to whom she could talk of her travels and sight-seeings, for the Captain's wife, with nothing to detain her in her childless home, had for years, accompanied her husband upon most of his voyages, and having a good sharp pair of eyes in her very sensible head, she had seen enough of the world to make her a very entertaining companion when in a talkative mood. Especially did she enjoy holding forth upon her recent experiences in Washington, where the Captain's schooner had been employed during the past season in carrying lumber for the new capital, which was then in process of erection upon the banks of the Potomac.

Mrs. Sol had therefore had occasion to spend



considerable time in the new city, and if one might trust her word, had penetrated into most of the ins and outs of the governmental machinery, and was, if not exactly intimate, sufficiently well acquainted with the heads of the various departments to stand a fair chance of success in any project that she might undertake or interest herself in.

"You'd be astonished," she declared, "to find how kind of easy and homefolksey them big bugs air when you really come to know 'em.

"Why, I've seen President Jefferson, with my own eyes, stop right in the road, and pat a little darkey on the head, (that was cryin' because he'd tumbled down, an' barked his shin,) and drop a sixpence into his hand, jest as any common man would. Why, 'f I wanted a favor, I'd ask it o' him 'nuff sight quicker'n I would o' one o' them puffed up critters that set up behind on the rich folks' team, with their gold lace, and their cocked hats, lookin' f'r all the world, with their big eyes starin' straight ahead, like a green-backed frog jest ready to bust with the dropsy."

Roxy smiled rather doubtfully as she smoothed with a practiced hand the pillow against which Mrs. Sol's nightcapped head was leisurely reclining.

"I should be kind o' skittish, seems ter me, about troublin' the President with *my* small affairs. He must be kept pretty busy, I shou'd think, with so many things to tend to all over the country."

She was thinking of Squire Biddle's "crusher," in the matter of her applying for a patent, and the



assured tone of the skipper's wife had puzzled rather than reassured her.

Mrs. Sol bestirred herself, for this insinuation put her upon her mettle as a true daughter of the Republic, to whom such a hint of personal unimportance must not be allowed to pass unrebuked.

"Land sakes alive, child! what's he *there* for, I shou'd like to know? Didn't we all put in and elect him on *purpose* to see that every man, woman and child in this great, free land, has his or her rights? Talk about anything bein' big or little, if it affects the interests of a citizen of this country it's wuth attendin' to. That's what's meant by all men bein' free and equal, and Nap Tinker has jest the same right to be protected in his line as Square Biddle has in his. And let me tell you this," with a wag of her head that spoke volumes, "if ever there *should* be a President of this Republic that 'd let his party or personal feelin's get the better of his love f'r the country, that man would deserve to have his name handed down 'long-side of Benedick Arnold's, as an out an' out traitor to the land that bore 'im."

The good woman spoke with feeling, for people at that period of our history had a high ideal of the character to be borne by the chief executive of the nation, moreover they had a homely fashion of calling a spade a spade, certain convenient catchwords familiar to the politicians of our own day not having been at that time invented.

We may smile at these pronounced republican ideas



on the part of an obscure Yankee skipper's wife, but at that early day, when newspapers were a rarity, and the telegraph, and steam engine things of the future, a voyage from Maine to Washington was looked upon as an important event in a person's life, and the observations of so extensive a traveler as Mrs. Sol carried great weight in the eyes of her stay-at-home neighbors. So Roxy treasured them up, and secretly pondered them in her heart, until by degrees, her plans and hopes assumed a definite form, although with characteristic caution, she kept them a secret even from Prue. As for that small woman, her sister noted with ever growing satisfaction, the returning roses upon her softly rounded cheek, and the old manner, half playful, half petulant, that had replaced the unnatural gravity and sad submissiveness of those past weeks of privation and anxiety. That the girl found an attractive companion in Plumy Partridge did not at first trouble her sister in the least. Plumy was pretty and chatty, and gifted with a good deal of natural vivacity that made her an amusing comrade for the younger girl, who thought her the perfect embodiment of wit and good nature. To be sure, Prue's honest prejudices were a good deal shocked, now and then, by specimens of Miss Plumy's diplomatic skill in evading deserved reproof, or when, having carelessly broken a chip from the side of her mistress' best glass preserve dish, she put it carefully away upon an upper shelf, with a light laugh, and the complacent:

"She'll find it broke after sne gets round, and she never'll be the wiser as to who did it."



Honest Prue ventured for once to remonstrate:

"If *I'd* broken a nice dish like that, I should think I'd ought to pay for it. You know you hadn't ought to have used it for apple-sauce, when she's so choice of it, and only puts it on the table when she has company."

"Pay for it!" repeated Plumy with a laugh. "Then you *would* be a bigger fool than I took you for. Why, she has twenty dollars to my one, and can bear the loss a good deal better than I could."

"But *you* broke it," insisted Prue.

"Well, what if I did? I shan't pay for it,—you may bet your bottom dollar on that. She's mighty lucky to get me to work for 'er anyway,—fussy old thing!—and if I hadn't had that flare-up with the widder Jeff, I wouldn't gone out doin' housework this winter. As 'tis, I'm going to take it jest as easy as I can, the Capn's agreed to pay me so much, and I don't mean to kill myself with work, as long's I'm queen o' the kitchen, with nobody to say 'why do ye so?'"

"But you're such a good housekeeper, Plumy," urged Prue, trying her best to sugar coat her pill with words of deserved praise, "that I shouldn't think you'd want to slight your work just because Mis Barden can't come into the kitchen, to oversee you. And, honestly, it don't seem *right*, when you're takin' her money, not to give her a fair day's work for it."

"As to that," flouted the girl, with heightened color, and a pout that sat but illy upon her overfull lip, "folks that are poor, and have to work f'r a livin'



have got to take care of themselves, or, let me tell you, they'll come out o' the little end o' the horn. The rich always have and always *will* crowd the poor wherever they can, and if you can get even with 'em, *I* say, do it, every time."

That this view of the proper relations between employer and employee, as set forth by the astute serving maid, had no ill effect upon Prue was evident, for she sewed day by day, with the most commendable diligence, never slacking her work because she was not under the mistress' very eye, and finding a girlish pleasure in the selection of the shades that would best blend in the completed whole. Indeed, it was an altogether different matter that, in time, aroused Roxy's sisterly anxieties, and went far to influence her decision in regard to certain questions already secretly agitating her thoughts in regard to their future.

It was not long after their installation in their new quarters, that, one afternoon, while Mrs. Sol was taking her usual nap, Prue putting her head in at the door, beckoned her sister from the room, and with blushes and laughter, called her attention to herself with:

"How do you like it, Roxy?"

Roxy looked, and at first sight, didn't like it at all. The girl's sunny curls had all been drawn back from her face, and fastened in a most astonishing knot upon the very top of her childish head, while about her face, extending from ear to ear, was a row of little flat, rings of hair, arranged with wonderful care and skill, and known in country parlance by the enticing name of "beau catchers."



"Why Prue!" exclaimed the elder sister, scarce knowing whether to laugh or cry at the strange transformation, "how funny you do look! What, in the world, possessed you to make such a scarecrow of yourself?"

The small maiden bridled, and cast a look of blushing approval at her reflection in the glass opposite.

"Plumy did it up for me, and she says," with just a touch of defiance, "that it's very becoming, and that I'm plenty old enough to wear my hair done up like other girls."

"She looks as pretty as a picture," put in Plumy officiously, "and *I* say its too bad to keep a great girl like her with her hair all down in her neck, settin' in the chimney corner, sewin' rags from sunrise to sunset, without givin' her a chance to show herself outside, like other girls. It aint none o' my business, to be sure,"—and the Partridge assumed an air of virtuous candor,—"but it does seem as if a girl with Prue's good looks, ought to have her chance in the market with the rest."

Roxy's cheeks burned hotly, and a sharp answer was upon her tongue, when Prue eagerly took up the refrain:

"And Roxy dear, if you only *would* let me leave off tyers, and—and, there's that brooch that was mother's,—if I *could* wear that sometimes, I should be ever so—*happy*."

"Of *course* she would," appended Plumy, with a worldly-wise air that, somehow, nettled Roxy even



more than her words had done. "All girls like to dress up, and look pretty,—it's *in* 'em, and you can't argue it *out* of 'em."

Roxy looked mutely from one to the other, her brain in a perfect whirl, and her heart beating hot within her, at this sudden blow, for it *was* a blow to find the child who had hitherto never dreamed of taking counsel with another than herself, listening to the fulsome flatteries of this coarse minded girl, and at her suggestion, longing to throw aside, like an outgrown garment, the innocent childishness that had been so beautiful and unaffected in its pure simplicity, and come down to the level of these smirking, giggling girls, of which Plumy herself was so true a representative.

Still, and she acknowledged the unwelcome fact with a sigh, there was really nothing to blame the child for, in this reaching out of her woman's nature to grasp the toys for which her sex instinctively long, as with trembling yet eager feet, they linger upon the threshold of maidenhood. Only, if the awakening had come in the common course of nature,—or if a hand gentler than that of Mrs. Barden's handmaid had hastened the unfolding of the bud, she could have borne it better. So she whispered to herself, with bitter tears, as, in the privacy of her own chamber that night, she went over the events of the day, and tried hard to school herself to meet this new phase in her domestic cares.

Perhaps it was her own lack of personal attractiveness, added to the fact that, heretofore every energy of her nature had been directed toward one object,—



the care of those dependent upon her,—that had robbed her of many of the natural desires and longings of a healthy girlhood, and this sudden awakening to the fact that Prue was no longer a child, but a woman, with all a woman's natural longing for recognition and a place among her mates, came to her with a painful suddenness that, at the first, made it impossible for her to adjust herself to the new order of things, and moved her all unconsciously to shrink within herself, with a chilly solitariness that Prue, misunderstanding, resented bitterly.

Why should Roxy turn the cold shoulder to her just because she wanted to dress and look like others of her age and neighborhood? And although she indignantly repelled Plumy's unworthy suggestion that the elder sister wanted to keep the younger in pinafores so as not to emphasize the fact of her own old maidism, she yet allowed herself to think hard things of that loving, patient nature, whose one thought and purpose in life was her good and happiness. And Roxy, far from blaming the girl for her petulant unreason, set herself all the more dilligently to contrive some way by which she could meet the demands that must inevitably be made upon her in the near future. Prue was no longer a child, to be satisfied wlt h a child's inexpensive desires, and some way must be devised by which the larger needs of her life could be met, and, rendered bold by the very desperation of love, the elder sister ventured to unfold her plan to Mrs. Sol, after the roundabout fashion of her race and day.



"I wonder how much that woman you stop with in Washington, would be likely to charge a single woman for board for,—well, say a couple of weeks?"

Mrs. Sol started, and looked keenly into the girl's anxious face.

"Oh well, I can't say exactly, but 'twouldn't be much, anyway. She's a reasonable body, Mis McGregor is, if she does talk a foreign lingo, and wear a cap, ('curch,' she calls it,) with a great floppin' border, big enough f'r a ship's mains'l. She lets rooms to transients, and a body can board 'erself, and live as cheap as she wants to."

"And—well, how much would the Cap'n charge f'r a passage in his vessel, do you s'pose?"

"Nothin',—to *you!*" cried the good woman indignantly. "The fact is, Roxy,"—and the girl was surprised at the unwonted tenderness in the speaker's voice, for Mrs. Sol was not one to allow herself to descend (?) to endearments, either in word or act,—  
"such care as you've given me can't be paid for in money, and I aint one o' the kind that believes in payin' off debts o' that sort in soft words. But there's one thing that I want you to remember, and that is, that when you want a favor of a friend, you come straight to me, and I'll do anything in the world,—within the bounds o' reason, of course,—to help you. And Roxy,"—she sank her voice to a whisper, glancing suspiciously at the closed door beyond which the gay clatter of girlish voices sounded with pleasant indistinctness,—  
"if you want to go to Washinton with



us in the spring, it shan't cost you a red cent, and I'll put you in the way of gettin' that patent on your braid, if I have to go to the President himself, and get him to see about it."

Roxy smiled, but her eyes were full of grateful tears, as she murmured her thanks for such unlooked for generosity. But Mrs. Sol, like the kings of old, was not content with providing a conveyance for her favorite, to the "kings' mule" must be added also the "raiment that the king useth to wear," that the royal benefaction might be complete.

"Now you go right up stairs," she commanded, with an arbitrariness that left no room for questioning, "and in that big blue chist, in the chamber over the kitchen, you'll find a cambric o' mine,—a white ground, with pink dots,—and the breadths of my puce colored rattinet. To be sure, I'd lotted on makin' that over for myself, to travel in, but the Cap'n always hated the sight of it, so I guess you might as well have it, and I'll wear my invisible green pongee on shipboard. Anyhow, you bring 'em both down, and hand me the scissors,—I really think 'twould do me good to rip a little."

Roxy obeyed, indeed, there was nothing to do *but* to obey the Captain's wife, who was quite as much of a martinet in her own house as was her sturdy mate on shipboard, and having now fully decided that Roxy was to accompany them to Washington, she looked upon it as a bounden duty to see that the girl was respectably, even fashionably clad, according to the ideas



of her day and neighborhood. Although prudent, as befitted her New England birth and training, Mrs. Sol was not what her neighbors would call a "snug" woman, and being well to do, she felt that she could afford, for once, to exercise a generosity in the way of certain long hoarded bits of girlish finery, that fairly bewildered the recipient, and awoke in her, for the first time in all her life, some touches of womanly vanity,—a weakness that her friend certainly encouraged.

"Now, Roxy," she declared, with unconcealed satisfaction, as one after another of the completed garments were tried on, and pronounced a "perfect fit," "now Roxy, I don't want to make you proud, but I can conscientiously say this much, that, when you're dressed up, like other girls, *you look as well, every mite an' grain, as the next one.*"

Roxy colored consciously under this extraordinary bit of praise,—she had not been used to kindly comments of that sort, and there is no denying the fact, that the taste they left in her mouth was an uncommonly pleasant one.

"And now," counselled Mrs. Sol, "what we've got to do, is to say to folks that want to know about yer plans, that I'm goin' to take you with me on this next vyge f'r company. That's true enough, and if I was you, I wouldn't tell anybody, not even Prue, what you're goin' to Washinton for. It's a good deal harder if you *have* to sneak out the back way, when you've come in the front door with a blare of trumpets an' blowin' of tin horns, callin' everybody's attention to



what you're after. Besides, 'twould be a pity to let the children get their hopes set *too* high, and then be disappointed."

So Roxy took her advice, and in all her preparations for the anticipated voyage, not a word or hint did she give as to the real object of her journey.

Removed from Plumy's influence, Prue was herself again, loving, tender, and unselfish as of old, yet there was an undefinable something, a maturity of thought and speech, that showed only too clearly to the eyes made keen by love, that her maidenly feet were already set in those untried paths, wherein all of her sex must walk,—it may be in calm, sweet meadows, beside the still waters of domestic love and peace, or among the cruel rocks of disappointment and vain regrets,—God alone wotteth which it may be, for human love, unprophetic, can only pray, and hope, and trust that all may be well with its heart's idol.

By careful husbandry Roxy's winter's wage would not only pay her board for a few weeks at Mrs. McGregor's, but would leave a sufficient amount to provide for her household during her absence, while the Deacon had kindly consented to let Sewell spend his nights in his own home, thus removing any fear of loneliness on the part of his homekeeping sister.

Only a week or two before the time set for her journey, Roxy found it necessary to enter her cousin's door for the first time since her final protest against the elder woman's selfish greed, and unjust appropriation of what was really the property of another.



Granny had died, unexpectedly at the last, and as relatives, the Raes were bound by the funeral etiquette of the day, to present themselves among the mourners who assembled to listen to the required panegyric over the dead, before consigning the poor, worn out, old shell to the impartial bosom of its mother earth. It was hard to forego her natural resentment even at such a time, and yet Roxy's tender heart could not restrain its sympathy at sight of Dorindy's tear swollen eyes, as she tenderly smoothed back the thin, white hair from the cold forehead, and bending down, laid a daughter's kiss upon the still, pale lips, that were as marble to the unwonted caress.

They chanced to be standing alone together in the inner room which had been appropriated to the dead, and the girl was startled, almost terrified as, looking appealingly into her face, her companion asked, in a harsh whisper:

“Roxy, do *you* know where Peg is?”

The girl shook her head. She could not trust herself to speak, for the solemn presence in which they stood, the suddenness of the question, and more than all, the wild light in the questioner's eyes, struck her dumb for the moment, with a chill dread of some unseen horror, for which she dared not find a name. The widow laid a hand upon her arm, cold as the hand of the dead, while she whispered shudderingly:

“They say that—that she *appeared* to you.”

Roxy tried to rally her scattered senses, enough to make a sensible reply to this strange observation:



"She—she, that is, I *thought* I saw her the night she went away, but I've thought since then, that, maybe, I *dreampt* it, after all."

"No, you didn't."

And there was such bitter anguish in the tone that, forgetting all her own wrongs, the girl could not but try to comfort the almost distracted woman:

"There, there, Dorindy! *don't* speak like that. Somehow, I don't feel as if the child was dead,—I *never* have."

The widow gave her a look that, to her dying day she never forgot, and as the neighbors came tiptoeing in, one after another, to look in breathless awe upon the poor clay, that, for once, lay all unconscious of their presence, the pale woman, in her somber weeds, reseated herself in the chief mourner's place, by the coffin's head, while Roxy, too bewildered and shocked to listen understandingly to the service, sat, turning the subject over and over in her mind, trying in vain to find the reason for her kinswoman's evident terror and apprehension.

During those first few days at the Captain's house, Plumy Partridge, evidently thinking the subject a congenial one to those whom Mrs. Jeff had so cruelly wronged, had insisted upon telling the story of her suspicions, in regard to the disappearance of the bound girl, to which Roxy had replied with a contemptuous sharpness that checked all farther talk upon the subject in her presence. But now,—what *could* be the meaning of the woman's strange agitation, and her certainty



that Peg was really dead? Was it possible that all this gossip had its foundations laid in fact?

She looked at the solitary, black robed figure, shedding tears of unaffected sorrow over the old mother, who had been for years at once a care and a confident, and she could not bring herself to believe that the lost child's death lay at her door. And yet,—recalling all the stories of her cruel tyranny, her meanness and cupidity, and, worst of all, that unbridled temper, which, when fairly aroused, was that of a madwoman, her heart sank within her, she *could* not explain, and she *dared* not surmise.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE.

AT the beginning of the present century Washington was a city only in name, with scattered, unfinished buildings rising here and there above the scrub oaks and alders, while the uncleared forest in the background boasted now and then a windowless hut, where some far-sighted squatter had made himself a dwelling place, consoling himself for present privations by anticipations of the good time coming, when every half acre of this "city of magnificent distances" would be a fortune to its owner.

The President's house and the Capital were still only half finished, and along the broad avenues,—laid out in imitation of those of Paris and Versailles—rows of shops, unpretentious, low wooden structures, were filled with a queer combination of dry and "wet" goods, suited to the wants of their motley crowd of customers, which consisted largely of the workmen employed in great numbers upon the building and ornamentation of the new Capital of the young and lusty republic.

It was a rough, crude, and at the time far from beautiful picture, but to Roxy, fresh from the quiet and seclusion of that little out of the way hamlet, the



hurry and bustle, the clang of the workman's hammer, the cry of the teamsters to their horses, and the long rows of stately skeletons that, once clothed upon with substantial wood and stone, would become the homes of the great and honored of the land, gave something of metropolitan splendor and dignity to the scene, that even the inconvenience of walking ankle deep in mud a good part of the way had no power to dissipate.

For economy's sake the twain had walked up from the wharf where the Sally Barden was moored, and Mrs. Sol was in her element, pointing out the various objects of interest to her unsophisticated friend.

"Do you see off across there, that building that shines so when the sun strikes it? well, that's the President's house. 'Taint all finished yet, but folks say, that's been inside of it, that it's a sight to see, with its big rooms, and great long entries, (corryders they call 'em here,) and furnitoor fit f'r a queen. I've heard say, too, that their dinner-table was as fine as that that King George himself eats off of,—chiny that you can see through, and silver and gold dishes,—why, they *do* say that one set alone cost *five hundred dollars*. An awful pile o' money to spend on some-thin' to eat out of, but I s'pose if the President can afford it, 'taint no business of ourn."

The girl shaded her eyes with one ungloved hand, and looked long and longingly at the stately edifice that, in the distance, seemed a veritable "Palace Beautiful" to her simple vision.

"Yes, I see it," and she drew a breath of mingled



awe and delight. "I wonder if people really live, and sleep, and do their *cooking* and *washing* there, just as they do in common houses?"

Mrs. Sol tossed her comely head, and laughed with a little air of good natured superiority:

"Oh, you little goose! Of *course* they do. Folks have got to live if they're ever so high and mighty. But the President's folks have plenty o' niggers to do the heft o' the work, and folks say, (I don't know how true 'tis,) that Mis Randolph, the President's daughter, keeps a black girl on purpose to tend out on 'er, all the time,—to dress and undress her, to comb her hair, and hand her any little thing she may happen to want. Most likely though she got into them shifless ways while she was away to school in a French convent. That's the only thing I ever had agin President Jefferson, his sendin' his daughter to be trained by catholics. It was an unwise thing for him to do, turn it which way you will, and it give the Feds a handle against 'im at election time, but I guess it didn't do 'er no great harm, f'r everybody speaks well of 'er here."

Her companion made no reply to this bit of Washington gossip. She was looking just then with curious eyes at the unfamiliar Lombardy poplars, queer, trim trees, yet ornamental according to the standard of taste in those days, and which had been procured by the efforts of President Jefferson himself, at considerable cost and no little trouble.

"What queer trees!" she remarked, but Mrs. Sol's thoughts were elsewhere.



“Do you see that third house in the row?” and she pointed to one of a long line of wooden shops that bordered a portion of what was even then dignified with the name of “Pennsylvania Avenue.” “That’s Mis McGreggor’s shop, and she keeps house overhead. The Cap’n and I always put up there while he’s unloadin’, and a sweeter, cleaner, wholesomer berth I never’ll ask for, in *this* world, Mis McGreggor’s a clever creatur as ever trod shoe leather, and all the top-knots here trade with ’er, so’t you’ll find she’s a friend worth havin’, if she only takes a shine to ye. I,—well, well, I *do* d’clare if that aint her now, big as life, lookin’ out o’ her shop door!”

And with her face all aglow with smiles of greeting, the good dame hurried down the street, while Roxy, following close in her wake, felt her cheeks flush bashfully under the sharp but by no means unfriendly look with which the Scotchwoman regarded her, even while responding to Mrs. Sol’s hearty greeting:

“Gude guide us! But it’s nae yer ainsel, Meestress Barden? Weel, weel, but this is a sicht gude for sair een. An this lassie,—” taking in at one comprehensive glance the whole outward bearing of the stranger, from her meekly bonneted head down to the tips of her tidy calfskin shoes, “she’s no bairn o’ yours, I tak it?”

Mrs. Sol laughed good naturedly, although the color deepened a little upon her matronly cheek.

“Oh law, no! I aint got a chick nor a child in the world,—*never* had. This is one o’ my neighbors,



come to Washinton on business, and I brought 'er up here, thinkin' you might accommodate her with a bed and bite, for a couple o' weeks or so."

Mrs. McGregor's smile of friendly recognition faded, and a look of keen calculation settled down upon her face, bringing out all the queer little lines and wrinkles that, somehow, bore a strange likeness to the straggling figures upon her own carefully kept ledger:

"Weel, as to that, I *hae* a room, tidy an' sweet as a rose garden, wi an ootlook frae its ane window wad wile a body's vera een frae her heid wi gowpen at it. But," slowly shaking her head, till the voluminous cap border flapped and bristled aggressively, "it's nae to be rentit by ony light minded gallant or flauntin hiz-zie that may have the siller to spare for it. Nae, nae," as Mrs. Sol tried to interpose with a half indignant defence of her protege, "I'm nae dootin the lassie hersel,—*she's* nae light body, as ane may ken frae her honest face, but ye ken I'm a lone woman, wi nae-body to be beholden to, and if I want a bit extra for the *genteelity* o' the room, it's nae yersel as will cowp an' blether at twa an saxpence for the lodgin, an four shillins tippence for the feed."

As this was really a moderate price, Roxy was only too glad to close with the good woman's offer, and at her invitation, to follow her through the shop, and up the dark, narrow flight of stairs that led to the rooms above, where the simple housekeeping arrangements were carried on with an order and neatness that lent



an air of quiet gentility to the plainly furnished rooms, and rendered superfluous, according to Roxy's simple country notions, the parting assurance of their smiling mistress.

"Mak yeself at hame noo, and I'll send my bit lassie in a giff, wi fair water and towels, and anything else ye may speir for. Dinna mind callin' for anything ye may lack," she added, looking back from the threshold, "for I aye hold it my beesness to see that my lodgers are satisfied sae far as I can mak them sae."

She closed the door gently behind her, but the girl could hear her voice in tones of pleased surprise as she expressed her thanks for a small jar of cider-apple sauce, (a gift that Mrs. Sol had had much ado to keep intact through the voyage,) and had brought ashore in her own hands, on purpose to conciliate her thrifty landlady.

"I thought you'd like to try it," she said, "seein' you can't know much about our real American dishes, down here in this out o' the way part o' the country."

An indistinct murmur of surprise and gratification showed that the gift was most graciously received.

"Indeed, and I tak it kindly, yer remembrance of a puir body so far awa, and as for the bit lassie in the ben beyont she'll" —

Roxy lost the concluding words, nor did she connect them with the summons that, a minute later, sounded in some far-away corner of the modest domicile, where the landlady was evidently summoning the



"bit lassie" to attend to the wants of her new lodger. It was the first time in all her life that the girl had been ten miles away from her native village, and naturally everything was new and wonderful to her unaccustomed eyes. The bed with its gay patchwork quilt, and curtains of smart chintz upon which grotesque figures of dragons and griffins writhed and gnashed their teeth, in most bewildering confusion, occupied a large part of the room, while the small washstand and oval hanging glass in its antique frame, seemed to her the very embodiment of metropolitan grace and fitness.

Unused to, she never thought to miss the carpet, whose comfortable substitute was any number of homemade rugs; square, oblong, oval and round, drawn, braided, or woven in such a variety of intricate and gorgeous designs, that Roxy's housewifely eyes were fairly dazzled with their rude splendor. Indeed, she could hardly wait to divest herself of outward wraps, before she was down on her knees before one of the largest, studying with all the zeal of an adept in the rug-making art, the ingenious pattern.

"The middle of that rose is *yarn*, I know," she murmured with half-suppressed eagerness, "and the outside of the buds is green cloth sewed on, I'm sure—yes, I'm *sure* of it, and—Come in," as a low knock sounded upon the door, and half vexed at the untimely interruption, the girl rose to her feet and glanced indifferently at the intruder.

It was only a slender slip of a girl, in a neat, dark



gown, her black hair smoothly braided and fastened with a gay plaided ribbon, and her brown cheeks glowing with health and happiness as half-shyly, yet with the eagerness of a delighted child, she stepped lightly into the room, set down her water-pitcher, straightened herself, and looked long and lovingly into Roxy's astonished face.

"What? No—why, it *can't* be! Peggy, child, it is thyself, in very truth."

And with outstretched arms, and eyes glistening through happy tears, the excited girl rushed tumultuously for her old pet, who, on her part, had dropped upon her knees, and stretching out both trembling hands, with the palms outward, cried warningly:

"No, no, Roxy! Don't kiss me, don't *touch* me even, till I've told you all about it. I didn't mean to be a thief," and the hot blood burned in her dusky cheek as she uttered the shameful word in a half-choked whisper, "and above all, to steal from *you*, the only friend I had in the whole world."

"Of *course* you didn't" interrupted her listener with pitying tenderness, "I never thought for a minute that you *meant* to do me an ill turn. It was Dorindy"—

"Yes, 'twas her—the mean old snake-in-the-grass!" and Peg went on, unmindful of Roxy's gentle protest, to tell the story of her crafty mistress' plot to get at the secret of the braid:

"When she come home from your house that mornin', she says to me: 'Peg, the Rae's are just



overrun with work, and I've agreed to lend you to 'em for a week or so. Now I do hope that you won't go an' disgrace me with any o' yer slack ways, f'r Roxy's as neat as a pin, and expects everybody about 'er to be.'

Of course I was all high f'r goin', so I tore round, and did up my one tow an' linen gown, and darned the holes in the stockings you give me the first o' the winter before, and all the time the widder was that smooth an' sweet that I might a' mistrusted the cat under the meal if I hadn't been so taken up with the notion o' goin' to your house f'r a whole week, and maybe more. But when I'd fairly got outside the door, she called me back into the entry, and says she, kind o' careless as if 'twas an afterthought: 'Look here, Peg, you're a grand good hand to pick up things, if you're only a mind to, now don't you s'pose that by keepin' an eye on Roxy, you could see how she does that new braid o' hern? I don't want you to *ask* her to learn it to you, because that 'd be too much trouble to her, but if you *could* get the hang of it by watchin' her do it, and show me how, I could braid *both of us* new bunnits this summer.'

'A new bunnit!' Why I hadn't had nothin' but an old sunbunnit f'r my head f'r the last four summers, and I was ready to do most anythlng for the sake of havin' something like other girls for once in my life.

But all at once it come acrost me that I'd heard say you didn't want anybody to get holt of the secret of that braid, and I says right out, swallowin' the big



lump in my throat, (for I *did* want that new bunnit *awful*.)—

‘That wouldn’t be the fair thing by Roxy, to learn you how to do the braid unbeknownst to her, and I couldn’t bring myself to do it nohow.’

Land, if she didn’t blaze! Called me an ungrateful huzzy, and some other names that aint so pretty as that, till I was mortal scart for fear she wouldn’t let me come over to your house after all. But after a spell she cooled down a little, and at last, says she, as if she’d done with the whole thing, and didn’t want no more talk about it:

‘Well, g’long with ye then, f’r an obstinate, ongrateful pig! And if you *do* learn to do the braid I shan’t never ask you to show *me* how it’s done. You can eat my bread, and share my roof, and cheat me out of my rightful dues into the bargain, (for I s’pose you know that, bein’ bound to me by the town till you’re eighteen, what you *know how* to do belongs to me jest as much as what you *do* do,) and I’ve got to stand it, seein’ I aint got the heart to turn you out o’ doors.’

I felt pretty womblecropt, f’r I never had looked at it in that light before, and I made up my mind that I wouldn’t learn to do the braid, and then I shouldn’t be to blame for not passin’ it over to the widder.”

Roxy’s eyes had been growing bigger and bigger in her astonishment at such an unheard of exposition of the relations between a town’s apprentice and her mistress.



"Why, at that rate, she wouldn't allow that yer *soul* was yer own till after you was eighteen, I s'pose?"

Peg smiled rather dolefully:

"I guess she don't believe that I've *got* any soul," she said, with a grimace whose significance her companion well understood, for hadn't she herself heard the widow declare more than once that it was no more use for the child to go to meeting on Sundays than for a tame squirrel or woodchuck to be taught the catechism? It was a convenient doctrine, for it saved buying Peg decent clothes, while it secured an attendant for granny while she was herself absent at the services which she so seldom absented herself from. But it was no time then to re-open these old wounds, and Peg went on to explain that it was her eager desire to be of use to her friend that overbore her resolution not to learn the secret of the new braid, and laid the foundation of all their future troubles.

"It seemed so good to be able to help you in a way that nobody else could, and I made up my mind not to let Mis Jeff mistrust that I had learned it, even if I had to lie out of it. But as it happened, she never asked me a word about it, and I was beginning to feel real easy and comfortable in my mind, when all at once she started up and begun to talk big about a new millinery shop that she was goin' to open, and plan what she'd have on her sign. Then I found that somehow she'd got holt o' the way that braid was made, and the evenin' you came there and had that talk with her, I was in the kitchen and heard every



word, and after you was gone I jest went for 'er, and asked her what she meant by tellin' you such a lie about me, when she *knew* that I never'd showed her a thing about the braid?

She jest threw herself back in her chair, and oh how she laughed! (it makes every drop of blood in my body boil now when I think of it.)

'You know, I s'pose, that you walk in your sleep?' says she.

My heart sunk down just like lead at that, and I could hardly get my voice to ask what she meant, for I knew in a minute what she'd been up to, for many's the time she's kep me to work half the night, and I not knowin' a thing about it till she told me in the mornin'.

'Only this' says she, 'that you showed me how to do that braid *in yer sleep*.'

Oh Roxy! it *did* seem as if my heart would break. To think that *I* shou'd a' been the one to bring all that trouble on you; just about drove me crazy, and I thought at first I'd go and drown myself, so't I never'd have to look you in the face again. But the next minute I thought better on't, and all at once it come acrost me somethin that Mis Cap'n Sol had told me when she first got home from her last vyge, about a nice old Scotch woman that she lodged with in Washington, wantin' a girl to help about the house, and tend in her shop. She said she'd ruther have one that hadn't no home nor friends, 'cause she'd be better contented, so thinks I, 'I'm the one to suit 'er



there,' so I didn't stop to think it over, but clipt right acrost to the Cap'n's, and asked 'em if they'd take me with 'em, and speak a good word f'r me with this Mis McGregor? I didn't let on about the braid, but they knew enough of what I had to put up with to feel a pity for me, and Cap'n Sol spoke right up, and says he:

'Take ye with us? Of *course* we will, and we'll cover yer tracks so well that that old Jezebel won't git wind o' yer whereabouts, and put in a claim for yer services, on the ground o' yer bein bound to 'er by the town.'

We sailed early the next mornin' before anybody was awake, and when we got here, Mis McGregor took me right in, and she's just as good and kind to me as if I was her own flesh and blood.

That's all—and now Roxy, *can* you forgive me, and not lay it up against me that I was really at the bottom of all yer troubles, little as I *meant* to be? "

The tears were streaming down Roxy's cheeks, and as she hugged the girl close to her heart, she found it no easy thing to give speech to the emotions that filled that heart almost to overflowing.

"Poor, dear little Peg! I never held thee responsible, even before I found out how Dorindy got the secret from thee, but I'm glad to hear the story from thy own lips."

And Peg, folded in that warm, loving embrace, felt that, henceforth, life had for her no more regretful memories to mar the sunshine of the present, or cast a



cloud upon the future,—Roxy's generous soul had cancelled the debt once and forever.

It was hard at first to realize that the bright faced, tidily clad serving maid of good Mrs. McGreggor was the same with the forlorn, half starved little waif upon whom the "widder Jeff" had vented all the ill humor and spite of her selfish nature, but when Roxy, in retailing the home news, touched upon the suspicions from which the widow was just now suffering, Peg was her old self again,—fierce and revengeful as became her reputed ancestry.

"Good! I hope they won't never find out that I aint dead, and that they'll mistrust 'er all her life long of makin' away with me. Won't she squirm though, if they church maul 'er on account of it? I'd like to be a mouse in the wall jest then, and hear Deacon Skinner say, in that snuffle o' his, 'Owin' to suspected disorderly conduct, the widder Hackett is dropped from this communion,'—wouldn't that be fun alive?"

And there was something in her laugh that made the gentler nature of her companion recoil with a thrill of actual pain.

"Oh Peg! you wouldn't want her disgraced like that for a crime that she's really innocent of?"

"Wouldn't I though!" retorted the girl sharply. "She's guilty of enough, for if she didn't make out to starve and beat me to death, she come mighty near it sometimes."

But Roxy remembered the scene at granny's funeral, and her heart grew pitiful within her as she thought of



the wretched, haggard face of the solitary woman, and she could not refrain from making another appeal for the girl's forgiveness, useless though she felt it to be.

"She's a dretful unhappy woman, Dorindy is,—I know, from something she said to me at granny's funeral, that she thinks you've made way with yourself, and that she feels that she is responsible for it. If you could have seen her face then, and heard her voice when she asked me if I knew where you was, you'd have pitied her,—you couldn't have helped it."

"Yes I could," declared Peg stubbornly. "I jest *hate* 'er, not so much for the way she treated *me*, as the mean trick she played on *you*. But won't she rare when you go back with that patent in yer pocket, and say to her, 'Here you old thief! hand over all them straws, or pay me a good, round sum f'r the right to make 'em.'"

She was in such high glee over the prospect of Mrs. Jeff's discomfiture, that, for the time, she seemed to forget the other side of the two edged sword suspended over the widow's devoted head, and when she again referred to it, there was something of the old, tricksey humor in the relish with which she described how cleverly she had outwitted her hard taskmistress, at the very last.

"I thought I'd make 'er think that I'd jumped into the river, so't she wouldn't mistrust where I'd gone, and this is the way I contrived it:

"In the first place, I drew with a bit of charcoal on a piece of white birch bark, a picture of an injin devil,



(she used to call me that when she was mad,) jumpin' into the water. I pinned that on to the quilt on granny's bed, so't in the mornin' when she brought in the old woman's breakfast, she'd be sure to find it. Then to'ar'ds mornin', when all was still, I slipt out o' the house, and run down the path to the shore, drop-pin' an apron o' mine on the way, and leavin' the prints of my feet of course in the soft mud. I knew that jest as quick as she found that picture, she'd start for the shore by the path through the garden, and in that way, she'd be sure to find the signs of my havin' been there before 'er, and take it for granted that I'd drowned myself."

"But if you wanted to make Dorindy think that you'd gone and drowned yerself, why didn't you leave a note instead of a picture?"

Peg shook her head cunningly:

"Hadn't no paper, nor pen and ink,—and besides, don't you see, 'twould a' been a *lie* if I'd *writ* anything, but the picture jest *hinted*, and I wa'ant to blame for the way she might happen to take it, was I?"

"Seems to me," returned honest Roxy, "that one was just as much an intended lie as the other would a' been. F'r *my* part, I'd as lives eat the devil as drink his broth."

Peg smiled, a very superior smile. It was evident that her simple minded friend was, by no means, up to the advanced ideas regarding the moral questions of her day and generation, that the shrewder damsel had long since worked out, to her own satisfaction, at least.



"No it wasn't,—it was only a 'pardonable deception.' "

Roxy looked curious, for those big words sounded suspiciously foreign upon Peg's Yankee bred tongue,—where could she have caught them?

The girl evidently suspected the thought, for she went on, nothing loth, to enlighten her:

"You see, I've learned that much from the newspaper that Mis McGreggor takes. When the party that they're boostin' up, takes a sly, underhand way to bring about somethin' f'r the good o' the country, (or the party,—it's all one,) and 'tother party finds it out, and begins to rare an' tear at 'em for cheats an liars, why all they've got to do is to turn right round and knock 'em stiff with somethin' about 'pardonable deceptions,' and the 'wisdom of silence.' It's an awful slick way of gettin' out of a scrape, and it sounds real good and fine, besides."

Roxy stared aghast. What had come over the girl, with her newspaper readings, and her irreverent talk about the great political parties, as if they were so many neighbors' boys, playing and squabbling over a game of "pitch-toss?" Her brain whirled at this unheard of evolution of the wide awake Peg, and it was with a feeling of uncertainty new to her brave, energetic nature, that she approached Mrs. Sol upon the matter naturally uppermost in her own mind, and which had nerved her to take this long, and to her, perilous journey to the very seat of the land's law.

Here too she found a surprise awaiting her in the



unlooked for reluctance of her friend to take upon herself the role of chaperon in a visit to the Patent Office.

“You’ll have to wait till the Cap’n can take a day off to go with you,” she declared, in reply to the girl’s urgent request that the matter might be attended to as soon as possible. “Men understand about these things, and they have a sort of independent way with ’em that most generally carries the day. F’r *my* part, I shouldn’t know no more’n a hen what to say after I’d *got* there.”

This from the woman who, in the privacy of her own home, had boasted so bravely of her intimacy with these great ones of the earth. It was all very well among the unsophisticated townfolk of little Bestport to talk large of her Washington acquaintances, and metaphorically, to

“Hail them Tom or Jack.”

but when it really came to actual contact with these great makers of our nation’s history, the good dame’s courage fairly oozed out at her finger’s ends, leaving her only the plain, unassuming wife of an obscure Yankee skipper, of whose existence even not a score of souls in the whole city either knew or cared.

Nothing wilts the cockscomb of vulgar self-assertion in the bonnet of the ordinary man or woman as does actual contact with the really great. And when we hear an obscure individual speaking with unbecoming familiarity of certain great men, calling them by diminutives of their Christian names, perhaps, and referring to certain occasions where circumstances



placed them for the time being, upon a common level, instead of fancying him hand and glove with this famous "Tom" or "Jim," it is pretty safe to conclude that if brought into close relations with these men, none would realize his insignificance more than he, or bow more abjectly to the superior personality or position of those whom he affects, at a distance, to regard as his pothouse cronies.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FIRST GENTLEMAN IN THE LAND.

“OH, what a beau-ti-ful carriage! And see that gentleman riding alongside of it,—how straight and grand he carries himself, jest as if the horse and he was one critter. There—why, they’re stoppin’ here as true’s you’re alive, and the nigger man is helpin’ the prettiest little girl out o’ the ker-ridge. Who *can* they be?”

Roxy had for the last few days been living in such a whirl of excitement; that all her little staidnesses had been forgotten for the time, and her tongue ran as glibly as Peg’s own.

While waiting Captain Sol’s convenience to accompany her to the Patent Office, our little country maiden had found an unwonted excitement in visiting the shop beneath her lodgings, where, cozily sitting behind the high counter, she could watch passers-by from the near show window, or study unnoticed the customers, of which the tidy Scotch woman had no lack.

On this special morning, the mistress herself being out, Peg occupied the post of honor behind the tall desk, and it was to her that Roxy’s eager question was directed.



She looked up quickly from the long line of figures over which she was poring, and with a glance through the window at the fine turn-out, jumped down from her stool, and hastily smoothing out her fresh white apron, hurried forward just in time to return modestly the polite salutation of the little Miss who came tripping into the shop,—the dusky footman holding the door open for her with an air of profound reverence, her cheeks rosy with the fresh morning air, and a crop of short chestnut curls framing in the sweet childish face, from whose frank blue eyes looked out an innocent friendliness that had in it not a trace of condescension or conceit.

“Good morning!” and she smiled pleasantly, as if unconscious of Peg’s blushing embarrassment.

“I wish to purchase a new bonnet for my Mademoiselle Polie.”

And from under her pretty scarlet cloak she drew, with a great display of motherly solicitude, a big wax doll, attired in the latest Parisian fashion, but with only a bit of spangled gauze covering her flaxen curls,

“I named her for my aunt Polly,” explained the little mother, pretending to hush her baby, and giving a mischievous look out of the corner of her eye at the admiring faces of the girls who, in their wonder and delight, had pressed nearer to see this rare and wonderful beauty from over the seas.

“But she is French, you see, so I have to call her what the little girls in the French convent where



auntie went to school, used to call her. She wore a turban with a pink plume in it when she came here, but I'm afraid that, in this cold climate, she'll catch the consumption if she don't have something warmer for her head."

She glanced with a pretty air of appeal from one to the other, and Peg's countenance fell,—she would have been the happiest girl in Washington at that moment, if she could have furnished the bit of doll's finery that the little lady craved:

"I'm dretfully sorry, but,—I'm afraid—" she began, when Roxy interrupted her with glowing cheeks, and the eager

"Hold on a minute!"

And darting up the stairway that led to her own room, she quickly reappeared, balancing upon one finger in proud triumph, the daintiest and most diminutive of bonnets, fashioned from the Martha Jefferson braid, and worthy to deck the brow of Titania herself, should the fairy queen take a notion to indulge in a carriage drive.

"Here," and with practiced fingers she fitted it to the waxen head, setting it well forward, after the fashion of the day, and pulling out a curl here and there, in unconscious imitation of its pretty mistress' own head gear.

"There—it fits like a mitten." And the little stranger joyfully echoed the sentiment:

"It might have been *made* for her. Oh what fun I'll have trimming it!"



Then suddenly recollecting herself, she drew a tiny silk purse from her satchel, with the question:

"What shall I pay you for it?"

"Nothing. Miss. You're *more'n* welcome to it."

The little lady colored, and glanced uncertainly towards the door, where the tall, white-haired gentleman who had so kindled Roxy's enthusiasm, having entered unnoticed in the excitement, now stood, watching the scene, with a kindly yet amused smile upon his handsome face.

"But you *must* let me pay you," persisted the child. "Didn't you make it to sell?"

Roxy shook her head.

"No," she said, coloring a little under the gentleman's curious eyes. "It is a model for a kind of straw braid that I came here to get a patent for. I made two of them to bring with me, to show the Patent Office folks, and I can spare this one as well as not,—*do* let me give it to you."

The gentleman now came leisurely forward, and the little maid held it out for his inspection:

"See, grandpapa," dropping her voice confidentially, "Did you ever see anything so perfectly lovely as this—"

"Martha Jefferson braid," appended Peg shrewdly.

The gentleman gravely examined the really beautiful and ingenious work:

"And you have come to Washington to get a patent on it?" he asked.

Something in the reassuring glance of those calm,



clear eyes won the girl's rarely given confidence, and she replied, with a little bashful hesitation:

"Yes sir, I have come all the way from my home in Maine on purpose to get a patent that will keep my neighbors from stealing the secret of it, and crowding me out of the business entirely. I was a good while thinking it out, and it seems only fair that, if there *is* any money in it, I should be the one to have the profit of it."

He smiled.

"Then you'll miss the fate of inventors generally, but—"

Here his little granddaughter, who had been listening with intelligent interest to the girl's words, plucked him by the sleeve, and standing on tiptoe, whispered a few words in his ear.

"Well, well," and he nodded good naturedly, as he gathered the child's hand in his own with a touch that was in itself a caress. "You're a brave girl to venture in such untried paths, with so little to encourage you, but we'll see what can be done for you."

He held out his hand, which Roxy took with an unwonted shyness, although she could scarce forbear her smiles at sight of the myterious nods and grimaces whereby the little lady expressed her own satisfaction, and sought to reassure the timid stranger.

As the door closed upon them, Peg dropped into the nearest chair, and laughed and cried by turns, like a crazy creature.

"Why, Peg, child,—what *is* the matter?" pleaded



her friend, half frightened at such unaccountable behaviour.

But Peg caught her about the waist, with a hysterical laugh:

"You'll get your patent, *sure*, now,—and no mistake."

Roxy stared uncomprehendingly:

"How? Why?"

Peg drew herself up with a little air of triumph:

"Why, that was President Jefferson, his own self, and his little granddaughter Lucy Randolph, (her mother is the Marthy Jefferson that you named your braid for)."

For a moment, Roxy stood, too bewildered to speak, then tears of heartfelt gratitude sprang to her eyes, and in a voice scarce above a whisper, yet instinct with fresh hope and courage, she murmured gratefully:

"It must a' been God himself that sent that little girl here this mornin', after a bunnit for her doll."

And who shall say that it was not?

Two days later, the whole McGregor household was thrown into a fever of excitement over an invitation received by Roxy, from the President's granddaughter, to dine with her that evening at the White House. The tall colored footman had brought the prettily worded note, written by the young lady herself, with "mamma's compliments," and a polite intimation that the carriage would be sent for her at an early hour, that the children of the household might have the pleasure of meeting her before their own early bedtime came.



It was a child's kindly thought, to repay in this pleasant way the debt, that Roxy's honest New England pride had shrunk from receiving an equivalent in money for, but Mrs. McGreggor shook her wise head, and looked unutterable things:

"Aye, but the bit lassie has aulder heids behint her," she whispered in confidence to the Captain's wife. "Her mither's oop to all kinds o' tricks to gar puir folks a lift, and if she's gotten wind o' Roxy's eerand here, we needna fash oursels about the ootcome o' it."

That the two matrons were far more deeply impressed with the honor of an invitation to the White House than was Roxy herself was evident from the elaborate preparations that, almost as soon as the messenger had turned his back, began to be discussed between them.

"What will you wear, Roxy?" demanded Mrs. Sol, an anxious frown wrinkling her comely face. "You've got to have an overgown and petticoat of some sort of fine goods, and lace f'r yer sleeves, and a neckerchief, and kid slippers, and silk stockings, and a lace apron, and—"

"Gude save us, gossip!" laughed Mrs. McGreggor, interrupting the other's inventory of the articles needed to make her protegee presentable as the guest of greatness. "Ye'll be after makin a milliner's doll o' the lassie, at that rate. Nae, nae, let the bunched oop gown an the petticoatie gae for ance, she'll pass muster wiout 'em. The cambric 'll be braw enow lackin the cape."



But here Roxy herself interposed with shamefaced protest against wearing the gown without the cape:

“Why, I couldn’t be seen with my neck *bare!*” she cried, blushing to the very roots of her hair at the mere thought of such an indelicate exposure. “Such a rig would be fairly indecent.”

Mrs. McGreggor smiled grimly:

“That’s as ane thinks,” she remarked, with a knowing nod to the Captain’s wife. “But I’ve been tauld that, at their great balls and receptions, the fine leddies hae their gowns sae scrimpit at the tap, that a decent body must needs look the tither way, f’r shame’s sake.”

“But there’s that pretty cape that you’ve been all winter workin’ on,” cried Mrs. Sol, “that’ll be just the thing to cover yer neck; and there’s that lace apron that the Cap’n brought me from Paris, years ago,—you can wear that to give a touch o’ gentility to yer gown.”

“And yer weelcome to my silk stockings and white satin slippers, that were a pairt o’ my ain weddin tocher,” put in the Scotch woman, not to be outdone in generosity, while Roxy looked silently from one to the other, uncertain whether to be glad or sorry over her friends’ proposal to deck her with borrowed plumes for this, her first flight into the great world of which she had heard so much, and knew so little.

The same feeling of self respectful pride that had sealed her lips during those long, terrible weeks, when want and hunger had actually stared her in the face, made her shrink from accepting the proffered loans,



even while she gratefully recognized the kindly feeling that had prompted them.

In truth, it was solely in deference to this feeling on her friends' part, that she made no remonstrance when, dinner being over, her hostess resigned the care of the shop to Peg, and solemnly ushered the Captain's wife and Roxy into her own private sitting-room, where a small fire burning in the grate, and a pair of curling tongs, flanked by a pot of pomatum and a box of face powder, gave mute warning to the intended victim, of the fiery trial in store for her.

"Bring her claes in here, an the twa o' us 'll busk 'er brawly. And mind ye hae the irons ready het when I ca' for 'em," commanded the dame with the tone and air of a Hubert to his factotum:

"Heat me the irons hot, and look thou stand within the arras;

When I strike my foot, . . ."

and Roxy, albeit she had never heard of Shakespeare or the unfortunate "little prince," felt a nervous chill creep down her back, as if in the presence of some vague, approaching peril that she must at least make the effort to avert:

"I never had my hair curled on an iron in my life," she urged timidly as Mrs. Sol, in obedience to orders, thrust the curling iron into the fire, with an expression of stern determination upon her close shut lips.

"As long as it don't curl naturally like Prue's, I think I'd *ruther* wear it plain, as I always do."

"Dinna fash yoursel'! I'll gar it luik sae honest



that naebody 'll ken it frae the real thing," and the energetic tirewoman began winding one of the girl's long, brown tresses about the heated iron with such incautious haste that the smell of singed hair filled the room, and drew a regretful cry from the victim, whose one beauty was being so ruthlessly despoiled.

"It's underneath, 'twont show much," was Mrs. Sol's consolatory remark, as she rubbed the hot steel free from the scorched fragments. "I'll look out, and not get it so hot next time."

And so the work went on, much to the satisfaction of the Gaptain's wife, who watched the lofty structure as it grew in height and dignity, a veritable tower of frizzled, pomatumed and bepowdered hair.

A cousin of Mrs. McGreggor's had been lady's maid to a dame of degree in the old country, and it was from her that the canny Scotch woman had acquired her knowledge of the art of fashionable hairdressing, which she was only too delighted to employ in making the homely little country maiden presentable, as the guest of greatness.

"I wad use the low cushion on common occasions," she remarked, as with grave exactness she drew the heavy mass of hair upward from poor Roxy's strained forehead, and arranged it over the lofty framework designed for its support, while the long, curled ends hung down at the back like the wig of a chief justice of the last century.

But Mrs. Sol's energetic soul could not long remain satisfied with being simply a looker-on:



"You aint got a stray hoop layin' round loose, I s'pose? Roxy ought to have one run into the bottom hem of her petticoat, f'r they say that everybody that *is* anything, wears 'em for a dress-up."

The hoop was quickly forthcoming, and now, the hairdressing being finished, Mrs. Mac found leisure to assist in other, if less important details of the toilet:

"You're a bit choonkit about the middle," and she eyed disapprovingly the girl's as yet uncompressed waist.

"Lend a hand here, Meestress Bard'n an' we'll girt 'er oop into a shape that a leddy sud wear."

Obediently "Meestress Bard'n" grasped an end of the designated stay-lace, and with her friend at the other, pulled with all the strength of her lusty, country bred arm.

Roxy groaned, and gasped for breath, the two tire-women grew red in the face, and panted—but they still pulled.

"Hold hard, my hearties!" shouted Mrs. Sol, forgetting in her excitement that she was not on ship-board.

"Troth hinny, but we'll brace 'er oop, taut an' tight!"

And the laces, cracking ominously with the strain, were drawn up "taut and tight," and securely fastened, heedless of the poor victim's frantic gaspings and expostulations.

"You won't think anything about it when you once get used to it," assured Mrs. Sol, as, with hands on



hips, she stood panting from her vigorous exercise, "Why, I know lots o' girls that *sleep* in their stays—don't take 'em off from weeks' end to weeks' end, and it gives 'em the prettiest, slimmest waists you ever saw. You wouldn't think it now, but when *I* was married, the Cap'n could meet his two hands round my waist, I was that slim."

Possibly Roxy was too exhausted to continue the discussion, for after this, the final decorations went on without a word of protest from her, and when all was complete, the two women stood aside, and scanned their completed task with smiles of proud approval:

"Aye, but she's a bonny sight!" murmured Mrs. Mac. "Wi sic a pow she micht hold her ain wi' a' the queens an' doocheses in the warld, let alane a plain, untitled body like the President's daughter."

Mrs. Sol reddened a little at the implied distinction:

"We're *all* lords and ladies in this free country, as long as we behave ourselves. And let me tell you, Mis McGreggor, that the daughter of a man like Thomas Jefferson don't need to stick a handle to her name to make 'er one of God's nobility."

"Nae doot, ye're right," hummed the other, so intent upon adjusting an artificial rosebud in Roxy's hair that the irritation of her republican friend passed unnoticed by her.

"Noo, lassie," pointing to the big looking-glass over the mantel, "tak a gude look at yersel, and thank the Lord that He gave ye the makins o' sic a bonny bit o' genteelity as yer freends hae convartit ye intilt."



Roxy looked, and blushed, and looked again—what was it? Who was it—that strangely bedizened creature, who seemed, somehow, to be all head and—HOOP, with a little, scared face looking out somewhere from the midst, its nose unnaturally reddened, and its cheeks unnaturally paled, (thanks to that straightened stay-lace and the excitement attendant upon such an unusual toilet.)

The god Thor, hidden in Hymir's stolen beer-pot, whose "handles reached down to his heels," was not more completely disguised than was our modest, simple, little country maiden, by the unwonted finery with which the affectionate zeal of her friends had burdened her.

It was not herself, not the real Roxy Rae who looked at her out of those troubled eyes, and, with a remembrance of all the kindly painstaking that must go for naught, the girl burst into tears of unfeigned sorrow and regret:

"It aint *me*, and I can't make believe that it *is*," she sobbed. "I can't think of anything but a great dandelion gone to seed,—all head, and nothin' worth speakin' of besides."

It was a douche of cold water, ice cold at that, upon the good ladies' fervent enthusiasm, and they are not to be too severely blamed if, in that moment of suddenly checked satisfaction, some natural indignation mingled with the persuasions and arguments with which they tried to overthrow the girl's firm determination to go to the White House in her own simple, homely dress, or not at all.



"A pretty figger you'll cut, and a great idea the President's folks 'll get of the Bestport people, if they take *you* f'r a specimen!" snapped Mrs. Sol, quite as much in sorrow as in anger, as Roxy meekly withdrew to her own room, to undo as best she could, the work of the last hour.

But Mrs. Mac, with the honest candor of her race, could not find it in her heart to condemn the sincerity that could not bring itself to flaunt in borrowed plumes even to please its best friends:

"The lassie's nae fule," she admitted as, with a sigh of regret, she put the curling irons away, and proceeded to set the cluttered room to rights.

"Mayhap she'd be like David in Saul's armor after a', and the sling and pebbles fra her ain bit burnie may better win the day, bein as they're her natural weepens."

Mrs. Sol answered only with a weary grumble.

She knew her young neighbor too well to try to combat a resolution once formed, and her only bit of satisfaction, as she watched behind discreetly-drawn curtains, the President's carriage roll away, with Roxy seated in solitary state upon its drab broadcloth cushion, was in the proud anticipation of telling the good folks at home of this unexampled honor that had befallen her modest favorite:

"Won't their eyes stick out," she chuckled in an aside to Peg, "when they hear that Roxy Rae went to the White House to dinner, and rode there in the President's own keeridge!"



Peg grinned triumphantly.

“But won’t it be gall an’ wormwood to the widder Jeff, though?” The Captain’s wife nodded, and gave the girl a sympathetic nudge with her elbow:

“The widder’ll have ter haul down her colors before long, and f’r *my* part I’ll be mighty glad of it—she’s sailed under the black flag long enough.”

And Roxy herself in her delight and bewilderment, actually forgot for the time, the primary object of her visit to the Capital, and when once inside the President’s house which, comparatively rude and unfinished as it then was, wore in her eyes the similitude of a palace, she lost sight of herself completely in rapt wonderment and delight. Not so much at the stately rooms with their rich furnishings—the pictures that looked down upon her from the lofty walls, or the few bits of rare statuary from which she could scarce withdraw her charmed eyes, but at the inmates of that lordly mansion, who seemed in dress, speech, and manner, like beings from another sphere.

The gentle mother, lovely in her mature matronhood, whose every word, and look, and smile revealed the unaffected kindness of a generous nature, refined and polished by contact with the best society upon both sides of the Atlantic; the children, merry, bright-eyed boys and girls, full of innocent fun and frolic, yet never by any chance, rude or disrespectful to their elders, blending perfect freedom of speech and action with that tender reverence so becoming in the young and so grateful to the old, and which seemed so



fittingly bestowed upon the man whom a nation had delighted to honor as the apostle and representative of the most perfect system of democracy that the world has ever known. The man who, perhaps, more than any other, demonstrated not only to the young republic, but to the world at large, how the ruler of a great people, chosen by the will of that people, may, simply by the nobility and purity of his own character, adorn the highest station, and while undeniably the first gentleman in the land, may dignify and grace his office without any of those adventitious aids of pomp and ceremony to which the great ones of earth have, from the beginning, owed so large a part of that "hedged-in divinity" with which personal character and individual action have had little or nothing to do.

So simple, so devoid of useless ceremony was the life at the White House of that day, that our little country maiden was soon as perfectly at home with the grandchildren of the President as if they had been her next door neighbors all her life.

The dinner which, as the guest of Miss Lucy Randolph, she shared with the children in the nursery, was something for our country-bred damsel to talk about and enlarge upon to the latest day of her life.

The dainty china, the delicately patterned napery—white as Northern snows—the several courses, served with ceremonious exactness; the dessert of delicious hot-house grapes and peaches—a royal fruit of which she had heard, but never before seen—all the little table niceties of which rural Bestport was, at its best,



entirely ignorant, struck upon her unaccustomed senses like a glimpse of that wonderful "House Beautiful," wherein Peg's fertile fancy was wont to disport itself, for the benefit of her less imaginative friends.

Strangest of all, however, to Roxy, with her in-born hatred of negro slavery, joined to a decided prejudice against the victims of that institution, was the air of gentle authority assumed by the colored nurse over her juvenile charge, for while waiting upon them with punctilious ceremony, she took careful note of every lapse of table etiquette on their part, quietly but firmly calling attention to it in the half authoritative, half caressing fashion of her race:

"Tuck in yer elbows, honey—you member what you ma say about pigin wings?"—reminded the dusky mentor and the young gentleman who had received the rebuke made haste to lower the offending elbows to their proper altitude, with a sheepish, but by no means offended air.

"Don't smack yer lips so, missy!" with a warning look at the little offender. "De lady tink you no bringin' up at all."

This to the little ones, but even Miss Lucy, who sat at the head of the table and gave her orders like a grown up hostess, was not allowed to indulge herself in a breach of table manners unrebuked.

"You done forgot, Miss Lucy, what yer ma said bout de handle of de tea-cup bein' made to hold on by."

She spoke in a lowered tone, but Roxy caught the



words, and glancing up at the instant, she interrupted the look that passed between mistress and maid, and became at once conscious of her own clumsy handling of the delicate bit of china, conscious too that it was to keep her in countenance that the carefully trained little maiden had deliberately broken this common rule of table etiquette. That true politeness is kindness kindly shown, was never perhaps better exemplified than in this little, unstudied act of a mere child, to spare another possible mortification, and at that moment Roxy learned one of the best lessons of her life, that the root of gentle manners must be in the heart, and that all outward ceremonies and customs to be genuine must spring from that source alone. It was this thought that set her at her ease amidst all this unwonted grandeur, making her forget her first awkward shyness, and prompting her to do her best to repay her childish entertainers by the same little arts that had always made her so popular with the youngsters of her own neighborhood:

Cat's Cradle, Fox and Geese, even "intra, mintra, cutra-corn" proved as delightful, every whit, to the little Southerners as to their New England cousins, and when Roxy, with much ceremony, initiated them into the mysteries of the new game, "Marching to Miramachi," the nursery rang again with the glad young voices, shouting with little heed to tune or time, the favorite rhyme of the boys and girls neighboring to the Canadian border:



“Off we go to *Merrymashe*,  
With a load of sugar and tea,  
The sooner we’re off the better for we.”

A queer place that for a smuggling song, but neither Roxy nor her rollicking little playfellows had the smallest idea of anything unlawful in the lively refrain that even Mammy, who was by far the most dignified member of the little party, could not deny herself a share in. Round and round danced the happy children, with laughter and song, until Lucy bethinking herself of her duties as hostess, insisted upon taking her guest from the unwilling hands of the little ones, for a sight seeing stroll through the stately rooms, explaining the uses to which each was to be put when finally completed and furnished; and with a child’s natural frankness, discontentedly comparing the many comforts and elegancies of the dear old Monticello home with the bareness and make-shifts of the Presidential mansion:

“This great draughty house is enough to give one the chills all the time,” she declared, shrugging her shoulders, as, in passing along one of the lofty corridors, the chill evening air blew in at a hundred undefended cracks and crevices.

“At home all our rooms are finished and furnished, and if they are fewer and smaller, there’s plenty of room for everybody. And oh, *such* good times as we have, especially when grandpapa is at home. Last summer he had Alick make us the loveliest doll’s house, with shelves for Cornelia’s tea-set, and a drawer



underneath, where we keep our best doll's clothes,—all except Mamselle Polie's,—*she* has a fine trunk all her own, to keep hers in, and now she'll have to have a bandbox, for—”

She stopped suddenly in her childish chatter, and cast a swift, eager look at her companion's face:

“Pardon me,” she half whispered, with her pretty, old fashioned air of gentle courtesy, “but I forgot all about the most important thing. Mamma says that grandpapa will be at leisure this evening, and that you must tell him all about your invention, and see what he thinks about your chances of getting a patent on it.”

Roxy's first natural impulse was to shrink from bringing so small a matter as her own personal venture to this man, who bore the cares of a nation upon his shoulders; her next, (remembering the kindly interest that he had already shown in her,) was to follow her new friend without a word of protest, into the family sitting-room, where, with his youngest grandchild upon his knee, and his beautiful daughter opposite, where he could watch with fatherly love and pride, the flickering of the cheery firelight upon her fair, too delicate face, sat the President, his ruddy locks whitened by time and care, yet still erect, vigorous, and keen-eyed as when, years before, he had put his master-hand to that grand declaration of human rights that proclaimed the birth of a nation.

He smiled kindly upon the timid stranger, and motioned her to a seat by his side:



"And so," he said, himself breaking the ice, in sympathy with her, evident embarrassment, and nodding across to his daughter, "and so we have a claimant for 'queens-hithe' here in the very heart of our Republic?"

Mrs. Randolph smiled, and Lucy asked curiously: "What is 'queens-hithe,' grandpapa?"

Her grandfather glanced thoughtfully at the modest, downcast face of the visitor, before replying, and when he did, it was with the painstaking exactness that characterized whatever the man wrote or said:

"Hithe is the old English word for a small port or harbor, and a great many years ago, one of the London ports was the property of the reigning queen, and was called for that reason, the 'queen's hithe.' All the vessels that unloaded at this port paid toll to the queen herself for this privilege. And really, I don't see," he added, laughing, "why our republican queens should not have each a 'hithe' of her own, if she has the wit and courage to claim it."

Mrs. Randolph merrily clapped her hands, in hearty approval of this sentiment:

"I see you are coming round to my view of things, father," she said, with a roughish significance that simple Roxy failed to comprehend.

"If all *men* are born free and with equal rights, ought not the same truth to apply to *women* as well?"

Her father pretended to frown, although his eyes twinkled merrily beneath his heavy brows:

"Ah, Patsy," and he shook his head with an air of



assumed severity, "you would have served to point a moral for old Cato, in his plea against the over indulgence of your sex by their liege lords."

Then turning to Roxy, he began questioning her in regard to her invention, but so gently and naturally that, before she herself fairly realized it, she had given, in her own rustic yet straightforward speech, the whole story of her toils, her hopes, and her cruel discouragements, with the reasons that made her application for a patent an absolute necessity.

The President smiled, and Mrs. Randolph's gentle face took on a frown of womanly indignation as Roxy told of Squire Biddle's refusal to aid her on account of her sex.

"But it's an invention just as much as if a *man* had thought it out," interrupted Lucy, childishly emphatic as she caught the amused twinkle in her grandfather's eyes, while Mrs. Randolph added hastily:

"And a beautiful and useful one too."

The President himself made no comment, but at the conclusion of her story, he laid his hand kindly upon the girl's head, with the encouraging words:

"You have shown yourself ingenious, patient and persevering,—three qualities that inventors, be they men or women, must have to ensure them success. And if you wish me to, I will present your case to the Commissioner of Patents, and see what can be done for you."

Not until then, had Roxy fully realized the strain upon her nerves during all these weeks of anxious



suspense, for, with the almost certainty of success before her, she actually broke down, and cried like a baby:

“Oh sir,” and too grateful to be timid, she drew down and kissed reverently the hand that rested on her head. “To think of such as *thee*, taking all this trouble just for *me!*”

Little Lucy and her mother were softly crying from sympathy, and Jefferson’s own voice was a bit husky as he said, with an earnestness that none of his listeners ever forgot:

*“Any matter, however trivial, that concerns the humblest citizen of our Republic, claims just as high consideration and careful attention from the servants of that Republic, as it would were he the foremost man of his age, with a claim involving millions. And I mean no irreverence, when I say that a republican government should be modeled upon that of the great Ruler above, who takes thought as tenderly for the meanest insect as for the king upon his throne.”*



## CHAPTER X.

### LOVE IS MIGHTIER THAN LAW.

“WELL, Roxy,—here’s yer last ‘good bite!’ ” and Mrs. Sol dropped into the girl’s eagerly extended hand a neatly folded letter, addressed in Prue’s unpracticed hand:

“The ‘Belle o’ Bestport’ got in yesterday, and Cap’n Walker brought this letter up f’r you. ‘And now,’ says I to the Cap’n—‘Roxy’s got her patent, and had a grand good time to boot, and we’re all ready to start f’r home to-morrer, so this letter from Prue’ll be her *last good bite.*’ ”

Peg looked up inquiringly: “What do you mean by that?” she asked.

Mrs. Sol laughed: “Why, that’s what my mother used to say when the last part of anything was uncommonly good—better’n the first. She got it from *her* mother, who was one of the earliest settlers on the Maine coast, and had to rough it pretty hard fr the first few years. They hadn’t but one cow, so butter was scurse with ’em, and the children had to eat so much maple syrup on their bread that they got dretful sick of it. So, to stop their grumblin’, their mother used ter put a dab of butter in the very middle of a big slice of rye an’ injun bread, spreadin’ all the rest with



syrup, and then she'd say: 'Now eat all round the edges till you come to the butter, and that'll be the *last good bite.*' "

Peg nodded her appreciation of the pioneer matron's ruse, but all the time her eyes were upon Roxy's face, watching its changing color and expression, while slowly spelling out, word by word, the contents of her sister's letter. At the end, she crumpled the paper in her trembling hand, while she exclaimed distressfully:

"Oh dear, dear! An *awful* thing has happened to Dorindy,—they've arrested her for the murder of Peg, and *she's in jail*, waitin' her trial at the next term o' court."

Her voice was broken, and even Mrs. Sol looked sympathetic, but Peg's black eyes had in them a gleam of mischievous triumph:

"Good enough for 'er!" she muttered, but the Captain's wife took her up with a sharpness that was evidently unexpected under the circumstances:

"Hold yer tongue, Peg! The meanest thing a body can do is ter kick an enemy when he's once down. I d'clare, I wouldn't a' thought it of ye,—knowin' as we all do that the widder is as innercent of murder as an unborn child,—to be *glad* that she shou'd have this disgrace an' trouble come upon 'er. I was the means of gettin' you away on the sly,—f'r I'll allow that she didn't do the fair thing by ye,—but when I go back, I'll jest take you along with me, and mend all the trouble, by provin' that there haint been *no murder committed*, after all."



Peg set her white teeth tightly, while her eyes blazed defiance:

“No you won’t,—f’r I won’t budge one step,—*so* there!” she retorted savagely. “You can get ’er out o’ jail by swearin’ that I’m alive and well, but as to goin’ back to her, *I’d die first.*”

Mrs. Sol’s blood was up now, and she was about to reassert her determination to take the girl with her, in yet stronger terms, but Roxy interposed:

“Hear what Prue writes about it,” and she read, with tremulous lips:

The Partridge girls were the ones that first set the story afloat. They found an apron of Peg’s under a stone in the cellar, all stained with blood. And they whispered it about, to this one and that, till at last the whole town was up in arms about it, and the selectmen made a search, and sure enough, they found it just as Plumy had said, and then they couldn’t do no other than to arrest Dorindy for the girl’s murder. They said she acted like a crazy woman when the officers went for her,—swore she never laid a hand on Peg, but that she was guilty of her murder, all the same. And she wrung her hands, and cried, when Elder Dexter went to the jail to see her, and wanted him to pray for her, for she owned she’d been a dreadful wicked woman, and that Peg’s death laid at her door. The Jimmisons, that keep the jail, say that some nights, she walks the floor all night long, sighing and groaning, and that she don’t eat enough to keep a chicken alive. They say she’s wasted away so that her own mother wouldn’t know her. I pity her so that I want to go and see her, but I don’t dare to go alone, and am waiting for you to get home so that we can go together. I don’t believe, for my part, that she ever killed Peg or anybody else, *meanin’* to, but I don’t know what to make of that bloody apron, and she declares that *she* don’t either, so there it is.



“No more she don’t,” interrupted Peg, with a queer little laugh, that had nothing of mirth in it. “The fact is, I spilt some red dye on that apron, and I knew she’d give me Hail Columby if she found it out, so I hid it under that old grave stun in the cellar.”

“You’ll have to swear to that before the proper authorities,” cried Mrs. Sol, while Roxy added, in her gentler tones:

“I don’t suppose you’ll have to swear to anything, so long as you show yerself alive and well, to the Bestport folks.”

“But I aint goin’ to show myself to the Bestport folks,” stubbornly insisted Peg. “Do you think I’d be such a fool as to give up my good berth here, and go back f’r that woman to kick and cuff again? not by a long chalk, let me tell you.”

“As to that,” hurriedly interposed the Captain’s wife, “I give you my word that you shall come back here, the next trip that the Cap’n makes, if you want to. And if the widder makes any fuss about it, I’ll pay her for yer time out o’ my own pocket, and trust to yer honesty, to pay me back, when you can earn the money.”

Still Peg shook her head sulkily:

“Your word,—yours and Roxy’s,—’ll be jest as good as f’r me to show myself there.”

“In one way, yes,—but” and Roxy laid her hand with a softly persuasive touch upon the girl’s arm, “the fact that you are alive and that there’s been no murder done, after all, will clear Dorindy from *that*



suspicion, but there's something more behind that. You know, and I know that Dorindy Hackett is a *very* proud woman, and cares more for the speech o' people than any other woman in Bestport. Now, before I came away, I heard everybody talkin' about her abuse of you, and they went beyond all reason, makin' her out more of a devil than a christian woman. So, the fact of your bein' alive, while it will prove that she didn't kill you, won't stop the gossip unless you show by goin' home with us that you bear her no ill will, and aint afraid to trust yerself in her neighborhood. Remember, that for seven years you ate her bread, and was sheltered under her roof,—something is due her from you, in such a strait as this."

She had struck the right chord at last, for the sturdy independence that formed so prominent a trait in the girl's character responded with a quick, decisive:

"I don't calculate to take what I can't pay for, from nobody. I'll go back with you to-morrer."

Well pleased, Mrs. Sol would have expressed her approval, but a warning look from Roxy checked the words upon her lips, and as Peg left the room, she could not forbear the whispered comment:

"That girl's a queer critter as ever lived,—she hates the widder like pizon, and that's the very reason that she can't bear to feel that she's in her debt. If 'twant f'r that, I honestly believe she wouldn't care if they actually hung the woman for a crime that she never committed,—she's hard as the nether mill-stun, Peg is."



But Roxy had not studied that dark, unemotional face for years, for nothing, and she alone had noted the reluctant tears in the girl's eyes, that Prue's simple story of the unjustly accused woman had called forth, nor was she at all surprised at the cheerful alacrity with which she made her preparations for the unanticipated journey.

"I s'pose 'twas kind o' hard for the widder, livin' all alone so in the house, with Granny and me *both* gone."

And Peg paused a moment in her work of packing, with a sympathetic note in her voice, and a quick, half ashamed glance at Roxy's grave face:

"And you say she reely seemed to feel it, my goin' off as I did?"

"Indeed she did." Roxy spoke with a decision that evidently impressed her companion:

"How you talk! Now, I wouldn't a' thought she'd cared whether I was dead or alive; but," carefully folding the sleeves of her best gown into as small a compass as possible, and trying hard to speak with an indifference that she was far from feeling: "*do* you s'pose now, that they put *handcuffs* on 'er, when they took 'er to jail?"

It was no use,—and the girl broke down completely at the utterance of that terrible thought, and the hot tears fell unheeded upon the folded gown, as she sobbed pittingly:

"It's awful rough on the widder, and I,—yes, I'm *real* sorry for 'er."



"Come, come, Dorindy,—cheer up. Here's Mr. Graves, with his new chaise, waitin' to take us right home."

And Roxy put her arm tenderly about the widow's shrinking form, and gently urged her down the path that led from the jailer's front door to the near highway, where honest Nat Graves, eager to atone for his harsh judgment of the falsely accused woman, was waiting in state to take her to her own home.

"I'm afraid the neighbors 'll be on the watch to see me go by," whispered the trembling woman, with a scared look in the direction of the village, whose clustered houses caught the level rays of the setting sun upon their gray roofs with that air of lazy indifference with which a thankless soul receives God's most precious gifts of air and sunshine.

"Well, what if they *do* look at us?" rejoined Roxy bravely. "Everybody knows now that you are perfectly innocent of the crime laid to your charge, and they'll be glad enough to see you—" she was about to say "out," but checked herself, shrinking from the dreadful reminder that the word must suggest,—a delicate thoughtfulness of which the jailer's wife, whose good will had prompted her to walk a few steps with them, was incapable:

"Land sakes alive, Mis Hackett! what a queer woman you be. Now I shou'd think you'd be so ferce to let folks see that you're really out o' jail, and as good as the best of 'em, that you'd want every soul to see you on yer way home. 'F I was you, I'd jest



keep a stiff upper lip, an' brazen it out, for jest as sure as you go ter hangin' yer head and lookin' meechn, they'll begin ter say right off that you've got somethin' to be ashamed of, if you didn't kill the girl."

A dry sob burst from the widow's white lips, and she stopped, with her face turned irresolutely toward the house that she had just left, as if half inclined to seek its seclusion once more. But Roxy's cheery voice was in her ear, and Roxy's warm hand clasped her own reassuringly:

"You've suffered a cruel wrong, Dorindy, and there isn't a man, woman, nor child in all Bestport that won't feel for you, now it's known how innocent you was. Mark my words, you'll find you've got more friends and well wishers in this town than you ever had in all your life before."

To this the widow made no reply, but as honest Nat shook her hand with a warmth that he had never shown before, and in his blunt, but manly fashion, expressed his penitence for his unjust judgment of her, the look of hopeless humiliation gave place to a wan smile, although she said little in reply, only brushed away a tear,—one of the many that had washed all the hardness from her face,—and clung all the more closely to Roxy, whose pleasant, gossipy descriptions of what she had seen and heard during her stay in Washington, occupied the time during their short ride, distracting the poor woman's thoughts from her own pain and humiliation, and filling up the gaps in conversation, of which all three felt the unavoidable awkwardness.



That the terrible accusation brought against her, and her subsequent treatment as a suspected criminal, would have aroused the proud woman's indignation, and embittered her against the community in general for its ready acceptance of the story of her guilt, had been a foregone conclusion in Roxy's mind, but for this spirit of utter humiliation, this dumb acceptance alike of blame or kindness, she was entirely unprepared. The self poised, arbitrary, and proud spirited woman, who had held her own at whatever cost to the feelings and rights of others, was now a broken down, timid, and prematurely aged creature, whose one idea seemed to be to hide herself from the eyes of the world, whose pity would evidently hurt her only a little less than its blame.

The girl's tender heart bled for her, and when upon the threshold of her own home, the poor woman stumbled and nearly fell in her eagerness to gain its shelter, she could not forbear a pitying caress, the first that she had ever in all her life ventured to bestow upon her cold-natured, unresponsive kinswoman.

"Come, come, Dorindy! Here we are at home again, all safe and sound. And here's Prue," as the fair girl came forward with some natural embarrassment, and with an instinct of womanly tenderness began to unfasten the half bewildered woman's outer wraps.

"Does the house feel comfortable to you, cousin Dorindy? Where it's been shut up so it seemed kind o' damp, so I built a fire in the sitting-room fireplace, and left the kitchen door into the front entry open."



There was a respectful solicitude in the girl's tones, that acted as balm upon the wounded pride of her kinswoman, and drew from her a smile of genuine pleasure:

"I'm ever so much obliged to you, Prue,—it's warm as toast here." And dropping into her favorite chair close beside the blazing hearth, the widow stretched out her feet toward the glowing coals, with a long, deep sigh of satisfaction:

"And—why how, in the world, did you happen to remember that I always changed the rugs the first week in May, puttin' the square one in front of the fireplace, and the round, braided one by that window, where I always set with my sewing?"

Prue gave her sister a significant nod and smile, while the widow evidently unconscious that her remark had gone unanswered, continued to look about her with an air of housewifely approval:

"And my monthly rose has got three buds,—I wonder who thought to put it in the east window, where I always move it when the sun begins to be too hot in the south window? And there's the mourning piece that used to hang in mother's room, has got her own death written on it, right under Mr. Hackett's,—written beautifully, too,—did *you* do that, Prue?"

Prue blushed, and looked a little embarrassed:

"No indeed,—I—that is, I didn't do it *myself*, young Dr. Deane wrote it *for* me."

"'Twas kind in you to think of it, and I'm very much obliged to you both."



And with this, for her, hearty acknowledgment of the girl's forethought, and the young doctor's skill in penmanship, Dorindy went on to notice with words of praise a score of little changes, that, strangely enough, showed no variation from her usual seasonable programme. It was home indeed to the returned prisoner, and little by little, the prison shadow lifted itself from her worn face, and something of the old housewifely contentment settled down in its place.

Strangely enough, she had shown no curiosity in regard to the occupant of the kitchen, whose brisk footsteps passing to and fro in preparing the forthcoming meal, were distinctly audible, and mingled pleasantly with the musical clatter of china and the soft purring of the steaming teakettle. But all at once, a swift color flooded her pale face as the door was gently opened, and a voice that she had never thought to hear again in this world, called out in the old, well remembered tones:

"Say, Mis Hackett, which 'll you have f'r supper, the quinch preserves or the honey that Cap'n Sol's wife sent over, with her compliments?"

The widow started to her feet, and stared dumbly at the apparition in the doorway as if doubting the evidence of her own senses. The voice, the face, the form were all those of the missing bound girl, but instead of the old sullen frown, a smile at once mischievous and shy, illumined the dark face and made it for the moment really pretty.

"Which?" she repeated, with an impatient flourish



of the long handled spoon, with which the widow was wont to dip her preserves from the depths of the jar, in which she had kept them from time immemorial.

Mrs. Jeff made a step forward, and held out two trembling palms toward the waiting figure:

“Peg! I didn’t never think this of you,—comin’ back to me after all you’d gone through here. Roxy said you had a good home in Washington, and I thought, of course, you was there now. Does this mean that you,—” the words died in her throat, for this was the first time in all her life that the proud woman had humbled herself as a self convicted penitent,—but the next moment she went bravely on,—“that you *forgive me?*”

A strange look passed over the girl’s dusky face, a look curiously compounded of wonder, triumph, and, overmastering all, of infinite compassion and tenderness that, as she took half shyly the proffered hand in both her own, found expression in the softly spoken but no less characteristic words:

“Yes, Mis Hackett, I forgive ye from the very bottom of my heart, and,—I hope you won’t lay it up against me that I was the means of your havin’ all this trouble and bother.”

Roxy turned aside with wet eyes, and tender hearted Prue sobbed aloud, but the widow straightened herself manfully, while something of the old determination showed itself in the increased steadiness of her tones as she said, still clinging to Peg’s hand as if for support:



“I’ve got a confession to make, and till that’s off of my mind, I can’t bring myself to break bread with them that I’ve wronged, nor settle down in peace in my own home once more. The fact is, I’ve been a dretful wicked woman, while all the while I’ve been settin’ myself up as one o’ the salt o’ the earth, and jest as sure of heaven as if I was already wearin’ my crown and white robe. I thought, and thought honestly, that if I kept my regular standin’ in the church, paid my church and missionary tax, and went to all the meetin’s on Sundays and week-days, that I was doin’ my whole duty as a christian woman. I never mistrusted that cheatin’ Roxy out of her straw work, and half starvin’ Peg, had anything to do with my religious life. I said to myself that everybody had the right to look out f’r number one, and if they wa’ant smart enough to do it, why, that was *their* lookout, not *mine*.

“’Twas when Peg disappeared, and I honestly thought that she’d made way with herself, that I first begun to wake up to the idea that, let me dodge it as I would, I *was* my brother’s keeper, after all, and I was that wretched that, when I found I was really suspected of killin’ the child, I wa’ant so awfully taken by surprise as you’d think I’d been. I’d accused myself so long of bein’ the *cause* of her death, that if the sheriff hadn’t warned me to keep a still tongue in my head, I shou’d a’ spoke right out, then and there, and told everybody what I knew, and how I was really the means of her death.



There was a Bible in my cell, and when I couldn't bear my own thoughts no longer, I'd go to that, hopin' to find some word of comfort. But it was always sure to open to the story of Joseph and his brethren, and all I could see was:

'We are verily guilty concerning our brother.'

I'd read that over and over, till it seemed as if my brain was on fire. I couldn't shed a tear, and f'r days at a time, I couldn't eat nor sleep, while every time I shet my eyes, that dreadful text seemed right before me.

At last I couldn't stand it no longer, and I knelt down there on the bare stone floor, with only the stars lookin' in on me, and told my sin to God 'imself, and made a solemn vow that if I ever had my liberty again, I'd do all I could to right the wrongs that my life had been so full of."

"Oh, Dorindy!" sobbed Roxy, "you was really *too* harsh in yer judgment of yerself,—you've done a good many kind things, at one time or another, and—"

But the widow silenced her by a motion of her hand, and taking a key from her bosom, she proceeded to unlock a drawer in the old secretary where the deceased Hackett had kept his private papers, and taking therefrom a folded paper, she gave it to Roxy, with the half whispered command:

"Read it,—out loud."

The girl did so, and to her unbounded astonishment, found it to be a deed, formally made out, and witnessed by Granny and a consumptive nephew, who



had died only a few months afterwards, conveying to the heirs of Egbert Rae all the fertile acres that had originally belonged to said Rae. Approaching death had, it seemed, loosened the miser's clutch upon his ill gotten gains, and at the last moment, he had done his best to repair the wrong done his orphaned kinsfolk.

Mrs. Jeff had dropped into her chair, where, during the reading of the deed, she sat with her face shaded by one trembling hand, while tears of bitter shame and remorse dropped silently and unheeded from between her thin fingers.

Of the two however, Roxy was really the more embarrassed:

"I,—I—why Dorindy, I wouldn't 'a thought,—"

"Of course you wouldn't," assented the widow, in a sad monotone, "no more would I a' thought it of myself, once. And if I'd known about it at the time 'twas made, I shouldn't been tempted to keep it hid. But when it come into my hands, long afterwards, when the witnesses was either dead or too childish to remember much about it, the enemy put it into my head to jest keep it out o' sight f'r the present, at any rate. I reasoned this way, that I'd put out a good deal of money and work on the land, and 'twant no more'n fair that I should have the profits from it. Then besides, seein' you was my nearest of kin, and heir by law to my property when I'd done with it, 'twould come into your hands sometime, anyway, and a few years more or less couldn't make no great difference to you. But after my downfall, I come to



myself, and found I was a selfish, wicked, dishonest woman, instead of the 'elect lady' that I'd prided myself on bein' like, all these years, and I tell you now, that that knowledge was a harder thing to bear, and broke me down worse than to have my old neighbors and brethren in the church think I was a murderer, and refuse to come near me in my disgrace; harder even than to have Plumy Partridge, when they was takin' me to jail, run out and stop the team, to give me a mince turnover, and tell me with a giggle, that I must remember the way of the transgressor was hard, and that I couldn't expect to be fed on mince pie in jail."

"I'll give that Plumy Partridge a good clip in the side o' the head f'r that!" burst forth Peg, bristling all over with fierce indignation, while both Roxy and Prue took no pains to conceal their disgust at the ungenerous taunt of the widow's former apprentice.

"She'll find herself at the little end of the horn now!" cried Roxy, with a good deal of natural satisfaction at the sure prospect of Miss Plumy's discomfiture, and the blame that the whole community would be only too glad to lay upon her shoulders as the prime mover in their unjust persecution of the hapless widow. "'Twas spite that made her accuse you in the first place, and then when folks begun to make a stir about it, I don't doubt that she enjoyed bein' the chief witness against you."

Mrs. Jeff nodded gravely,—her mind was too full of other matters just then, to dwell long upon her accuser's motives or probable humiliation:



“I’ve got only one thing more to say,” and drawing the bound girl close to her side, she laid her hand caressingly upon her shoulder,—“I’ve made up my mind, if she’s willin’, to adopt Peg here as my own daughter. And, God helpin’ me, I’ll do jest as well by her, as if she was my own flesh an’ blood.”

The girl’s eyes were downcast, and her lip trembled ominously, but her words would have sounded cold and unsatisfactory to any ears not accustomed to her moods:

“Much obliged, Mis Hackett, much obliged. And I’ll say this much, that you may count on me f’r holdin’ up my end o’ the yoke, every time.”

Only that evening, alone with Roxy, did the stern barrier of blood and habit give way for a moment, as with her head in her friend’s lap, she whispered between her sobs:

“She shan’t never repent takin’ me for a daughter, for there never was a daughter born that’ll be more faithful and patient than I’ll be to her, jest as long as I have the breath o’ life left in me.”

And very faithfully was that promise kept, even although its keeping required at times, an exercise of patient consideration that few would have felt themselves capable of, and fewer still would have had the courage to persevere in. For the “widder Jeff,” humbled, penitent, and enlightened as she had been by suffering, had by no means lost her individuality, so that the old Adam (or Eve) would still crop out at times,—a sharp spined nettle or unsightly bit of



“thrift” among the painfully cultivated herbs o’ grace,—whose uprooting was a work of time, and was apt to leave an unsightly gap that only infinite love and patience had power to overlook or cover.

Protected by her patent, Roxy wrought faithfully in her special calling, building up little by little, a business whose proportions, modest as they would seem to us, more than fulfilled her highest hopes, and enabled her to carry out the plans that had, at one time, seemed so utterly hopeless of fulfillment.

Sensible and keen witted, even to extreme old age, she still clung to the delusion (?) that all wrongs, individual as national, could, if they would, find redress at the governmental headquarters, where Justice waits, with fairly balanced scales, to secure to every man his inborn right to work, with a fair remuneration for that work when fairly done.

“One man’s right to a living, under this government, is just as good as the next one’s— (so President Jefferson said, and I guess he knew what he was talking about.”)

In this simple formula was comprised her whole political creed, and to the day of her death she knew no other.

THE END.















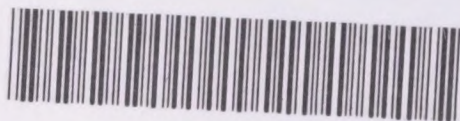








**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**



00022945646

